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MASTERS OF THE WORLD.

BY

MARY A. M. HOPPUS

(Mrs. ALFRED MARKS).

"He was not far from any one of them."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

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MASTERS OF THE WORLD.

CHAPTER I.

THE MASTER OF THE WORLD.

The rest of the spectators speedily followed Caesar's example. They poured out at the many exits. Those who lived near, went home to dine, the others crowded into the taverns outside the Capene Gate, or those by the Emporium and the Aemilian Portico, and even swarmed across the Tiber into the Mucian Meadows.

Calpurnia looked so tired that Aemilia hurried her into her litter, and desired the chairmen to make haste home, without waiting for their master.

Calpurnia's excitement had passed, and a deadly depression seized her as she went through the atrium —where they were just lighting the lamps. Some of the old terrors of her childhood revived. The images followed her with their eyes. Old Lucius's features seemed to have grown pinched and wasted

since she last saw them. She even fancied his eyes were trying to close against some distasteful sight. This expression, produced merely by the shrinking of the wax and the discoloration from long exposure, haunted Calpurnia. She thought of it as she lay tossing on her bed, while Tryphosa plied her with hot citron-juice, and little Tertia brought her beautiful Persian kitten—who was called Pasht, because she had belonged to a priestess of Isis. Pasht was a lovely creature—a ball of fluff—with dashes of russet among the black and gray. She had nestled up to Calpurnia, and was lazily stretching out a beautiful square-toed paw, to play with the fringe of her girdle, blinking her sweet sleepy eyes, and every now and then throwing herself on her back for Tertia to rub her soft breast and scratch her under the chin.

Aemilia and Cornelia were in the atrium. Dinner was ready; but Piso had not returned, although the Senators must have been the first to leave the Circus.

"Perhaps Caesar invited him to dinner," said Aemilia.

"If so, Lucius would certainly have sent us a message," replied Cornelia. And as she spoke there were sounds in the outer hall, and the women running out, saw Piso just stepping from his litter. It was not his habit to go about in a litter; but Arulenus had advised him to do so, in order to attract less attention.

Piso said that Caesar had made him ride with him to the Palace.

They went in to dinner. It was growing dark, and from the windows of the dining-room—small but very handsome, and hung with Oriental hangings—they could see the dim outline of the Capitol, towering above the Forum. Lights were twinkling here and there, and a great blaze high on the Esquiline announced to all Rome that Maximus was at dinner.

Piso had but just laid aside his toga, and taken his place at table—asking as he did so why Calpurnia was not there—when they heard the sound of heavy footsteps crossing the gravelled walks of the peristyle, upon which one door of the dining-room opened. With the footsteps came the faint clash of steel; but before surprise could turn to fear, the curtains of the doorway were thrust aside, and Casperius, the Praetorian Tribune, appeared, with a guard of Praetorians.

"*Salve*, Piso," said Casperius in a tone which might have denoted either respect or commiseration. "I am sent by our Lord God to desire you to follow me."

"Whither?" asked Piso—with his hand enjoining silence on the women, for Aemilia had started from her seat.

"That exceeds my instructions, Piso," returned

Casperius. "I was to bid you follow me. I have brought you a chair—it awaits you in the atrium."

At this, Aemilia's despair overcame her terror. "Let me go with my husband, good Casperius," she said, with a calmness which Cornelia could not have surpassed.

"It is impossible, illustrious Madam," he replied, with perfect courtesy, but also with the inexorableness of a Roman soldier.

"At least, Casperius, you can tell us something which will either remove our anxiety, or confirm our fears," said Cornelia. She had risen from table, and now approached Casperius, and continued, with the dignity of an Empress who hears of a revolt, "You will admit that it is unusual to send a guard of Praetorians to summon a Senator to the Palace—especially when that Senator has just been honoured with a public mark of Caesar's favour. It is surely permitted us to ask for a little explanation of so extraordinary a circumstance——"

"To you, Madam, who come of the blood of Africanus," said the Tribune, respectfully, "much is doubtless permitted. But to me, a humble Tribune with the narrow stripe, it is only permitted to obey, and I have already lost too much time. The illustrious Piso must come with me without another moment's delay."

"Let me but send for my toga," said Piso.

"My orders were very peremptory; but I will not hurry Lucius Piso out of his house without his toga," said Casperius.

Aemilia in tears, and Cornelia rigid as a stone, helped Piso to put on his toga, and accompanied him —through a crowd of scared household slaves—to the atrium. There, after a hasty embrace, he stepped into the chair, whispering to Aemilia as he did so, "Do not let Calpurnia know," and so was carried out into the night, Casperius and his men closing up round the chair with their swords drawn.

The chairmen set off at a swinging pace, lighted by the lantern-men, and Piso presently found himself, as he expected, descending the Slope of Scaurus. He now made sure he was to be taken to the Palace, and although this could hardly lessen his apprehensions as to his ultimate fate—yet so prone are we in desperate circumstances to snatch at every straw of hope—that the prospect of being confronted with the tyrant in his private judgment-hall, appeared less terrible than to be haled off to the Mamertine—there perhaps to be found dead before trial, like his own great-grandfather. Presently he perceived that his bearers were taking the road which led to the Circus. Cautiously putting aside a corner of the curtain, he saw that they were in a street much narrower than

the Triumphal Way—so narrow, indeed, that there was only room for a single file of soldiers on each side of the chair. The lantern-men had run on in front, and Piso was just in time to see the light of their lanterns fall on what looked like an archway spanning the street. A moment after, the street began to descend rapidly, and by the altered sound of the footsteps, Piso knew that he was in a covered passage. The roar of wild beasts, reverberating in hollow subterranean echoes, and a strong stench which began to offend his nostrils, confirmed the suspicion which had occurred to him the moment he had perceived that his bearers were not taking the usual way to the Palace. He knew that he was being carried along some of the underground corridors beneath the Circus, and a horrible thought made him suddenly start so violently in an access of fury and desperation, that one of the chairmen almost let go his hold of the pole. Piso heard Casperius devoting the man to the deities of Tartarus for his carelessness. Piso had just remembered how Domitian had compelled Acilius Glabrio, the son of a Senator, and himself Consul that year, to fight with a lion at Albanum. Glabrio was victor in the combat, but Domitian had since found a pretext for banishing him. But it was not fear which had clenched Piso's hands and sent the blood swirling to his brain, but the shame of

being made a spectacle to Rome. The very thought of such degradation as had befallen Glabrio almost maddened him. He had the day before seen a Roman lady—a Sempronia—of her own free will put herself to this shame. But the corruptions of the age found no tolerance in Piso's eyes. He was an Academician, and whatever was not beautiful, and decorous, and befitting, was abhorrent to him. It disgusted him to see others forget their own dignity—it transported him with fury to imagine himself compelled to behave like those he so heartily despised. Domitian loved a joke. What a fine joke it would be to make the haughty Lucius Calpurnius step down into the arena, like a bestiarius! The howls and roars of the wild beasts—fuming in the cages in which they were being hoisted up to the trap-doors, ready to seem to spring out of the ground in the Venatio—sounded dismally in Piso's ears, and it was with almost inconceivable relief that he found his bearers ascending what seemed to be, first stairs, and then several inclines, set at different angles, but all in the direction of the Palatine Hill. Piso believed they were going by some secret way which probably communicated with the Emperor's private passage to the Circus. He had walked along a portion of it beside Domitian scarcely an hour ago. Story after story rose in his memory of the malicious humour with which Domitian

loved to season his revenge. Like Caligula, he desired that his victims should "feel themselves die."

Suddenly, the chairmen stopped, and Piso knew that he was carried into a doorway. The chair was set down, and Piso heard the shuffling of feet and the closing of a door. Then the chair was opened, and he found himself in a small hall—evidently the ostium of a house. A gigantic Moor, with rings in his ears, was obsequiously bowing before Piso, and pointing to the door of the atrium. The ostium was dimly lighted by a small hanging lamp—a somewhat stronger illumination showed between the curtains which concealed the atrium. Drawing these curtains aside, the Moor bowed again, and intimated in dumb show that Piso was to pass in.

A slight rustling and shuffling had prepared Piso to find that the atrium was not empty, but he was astonished to see that it was crowded. The first faces he saw on entering were those of Arulenus and Mauricus. They silently saluted Piso, but did not speak. Next them were Herennius Senecio, and his kinsman Sosius, and Corellius, Vipstanus Messala —Regulus's brother—Mettius Pomponianus, Justus Fabius, the friend of Agrippa and Tacitus, and many others. But along with these honourable persons, Piso saw, to his great surprise, his cousin Crassus—who seemed rather ill at ease, though he

affected a careless smile—and the sneering countenance of Veiento, and Publius Certus, who was livid with terror. This company stood waiting—perhaps thirty in all—for, as it seemed, more than an hour, occasionally conversing in the most guarded whispers, but usually silent. Crassus, indeed, made his way to Piso, and from time to time dropped a sentence into his ear in so low a tone that no one else could possibly hear.

"Remember that here the very cushions of the couches have ears," he said; and then again, "Do we owe this to our friend who gave us the slip so oddly two days ago? Have you heard that Philolaus of Citium met him the same morning near the Grove of Aricia?"

Piso feigned not to hear this dangerous allusion to Apollonius, and moved a little nearer to Arulenus. He strongly suspected that Veiento and Certus, and perhaps Crassus himself, were there as spies—sent there in the hope that they might surprise some imprudent expression. But the same suspicion had doubtless occurred to all—scarcely any one spoke. Some feigned to consult their tablets. One or two drew books from their bosoms. And so a weary hour passed.

At the end of that time, the Moor reappeared from an inner door, and signified, without speaking,

that all should follow him. He ushered them into a hall where tables were laid for supper; but the walls, the floor, the tables, were draped in black; even the ceiling was covered with a black veil. There was a daïs at one end of the room, and upon the daïs a couch of the shape called *Sigma*. As the amazed and disconcerted guests entered this lugubrious dining-room, a curtain at one corner of the daïs was pulled aside, and Domitian himself, dressed in white, as for a funeral-feast, came in, attended by Parthenius and a train of slaves. Domitian reclined on the couch; and Parthenius, stepping down from the daïs, marshalled the guests on the couches ranged down the room, placing Certus between Arulenus and Mauricus, Crispus—the informer Crispus, a deformed old man, with a singularly malignant smile—next to Senecio, Veiento by Justus Fabius and Vipstanus. This was done in silence; and then Parthenius, taking Piso and Crassus by the hand, led them up to the daïs, where Domitian signed to them to take places upon the sigma. No sooner was this done, than a number of young slaves, crowned with parsley, presented each guest with a small silver pillar—a miniature of those placed upon tombs—and a funeral lamp, by whose light each could see that his own name was engraved on the pillar. Next, trays were brought with refreshments; but the dishes contained

only beans, lettuces, and funeral meats, strewn with parsley and myrtle, and crowns of myrtle and parsley were offered to the guests. Then wine was brought, and Domitian, breaking the silence, said—

"Let us pour a libation to the Infernal Gods."

It may be imagined with what cheerfulness the guests quaffed the good Setine. Certus's hand shook so violently that he spilled half a cupful over Mauricus, and the faces of most of them were pale enough to be those of the dead. And, indeed, did not every one there know that this might be his own funeral feast? So they moistened their dry throats with the generous wine, and tried to swallow the funeral meats, and stole glances at Domitian, whose large, dim eyes seemed to each trembling Senator to be fixed on *him*—glassy and inscrutable—and those terrible bristling eyebrows to be bent on *him* in a death-dealing frown.

Suddenly a company of little boys, black and naked, came in and danced a wild and melancholy measure, such as larvae might dance among the graves—then suddenly stood still, the whites of their eyes gleaming horribly. Before the guests had recovered from the horror of this ghoulish dance, funeral instruments and ornaments were brought in—the funeral flutes and pipes, the broad hat of undyed felt which a freedman wore at his master's obsequies,

perfumes, incense, myrrh, and cassia, cups of oil—and, lastly, that the wretched guests might indeed feel the cold breath of death, urns and tear-bottles. And, as with trembling hands they accepted these ominous gifts, a procession of libitinarii entered noiselessly, and took up their position round the room—flute-players, lictors, torch-bearers, all dressed in black.

Until now all had been done in silence, and the hall being very insufficiently lighted, except at the upper end, where Domitian sat, a funeral gloom had been added to the other horrors. But now the torches, flaring and smoking against the black hangings, shed a lurid glare on the scene, and the flute-players, setting their lips to the flutes, produced the faintest breathing of a funeral hymn—so faint, that it might have floated up from the banks of Styx.

Faint as it was, however, it seemed to break the spell of silence. The Emperor, suddenly addressing Piso, and pointing to the urn and the tear-bottle, asked him what thoughts those objects suggested to his mind?

"The Philosophers," he said, with a smile which made the ferocity of his eyes only the more apparent—"the Philosophers bid us despise death. What think you, Lucius Calpurnius?"

"It seems to me, Sir," replied Piso—and he saw that Crassus eagerly watched his reply—"that death is either a great evil or a great good. A slow death, by sickness or old age, is surely an evil. But when death comes quickly, as in battle for one's country, it is surely a great good."

"None should know that as well as you, Caesar," said Crassus—who, although he had perhaps more reason to be frightened than any one there, had not entirely lost his presence of mind, and saw his way to a compliment. "Who should know more about a soldier's feelings than our thrice-victorious Germanicus?"

But Domitian frowned, and the flush, which in his youth had passed for the red of ingenuous modesty, deepened to purple. He was displeased at being called Germanicus and flattered for his military prowess before Piso, although on other occasions that glorious and beloved name of Germanicus could sound so sweetly in his ears. It was, indeed, at all times a ticklish matter to please Domitian—if you did not flatter him, he was offended, and yet, if you did, he suspected irony. He glanced at Piso, and dropping his eyes, and shading them with his hand, as though the light were too strong for them, said, in a peculiar tone—

"Our beloved Agricola, however, died in his bed,

unhappily for Rome. The Gods denied him the glory of that death which Lucius Piso thinks so happy."

Then he suddenly began to talk of murders and massacres—first of Agamemnon, and Medea, quoting Euripides, and lingering on those verses in which the Poet has described the catastrophe. Then he spoke of the proscriptions of Marius and Sylla, and Antony—and though he never mentioned the sacred name of Augustus, every one knew what he meant, when he said that the best of Princes might be compelled to do acts which could be misrepresented as cruel and oppressive.

"The state of Princes is most wretched," he went on, blinking his eyes at the guests below the daïs; while every one of them felt his heart beat faster, and thought that the funeral torches burned more dim. "No one will ever believe in the conspiracies they discover, unless they are killed. My brother, the divine Titus, who is acknowledged to be the most clement Prince who ever reigned, took a different way with Caecina—and indeed, if he had waited, it would have been too late."

This reference to Caecina—stabbed by Titus's order as he left the imperial supper-table—struck terror to many there. Piso saw Crassus turn yellow; but Domitian's eyes seemed to be still absently gazing at the couch on which lay Arulenus and Mauricus.

"No," he repeated; "if they have the luck to discover it in time, every one thinks they invented it. A Prince must consent to die, if he would have his word believed."

And then he began to speak of the attack on the Capitol.

"Our good Arulenus should remember it," he said; "I believe he was there. My poor uncle! He was not prompt enough. Instead of parleying with Vitellius, he should have seized the Capitol two days before he did. Nay; he never did seize it—he was but driven into it. It was not till I took the command, that the Vitellians gave way. That was a bloody day—and poor old Musonius Rufus must go out to Primus's men, and harangue them on the folly of war! He nearly got his head broke for his pains, as foolish meddlers deserve. There was another of such philosophical meddlers—Helvidius; he was always prating of the Stoics, and of the old traitor Thrasea, who was—there is not the slightest doubt of it—in Caius Piso's conspiracy."

At those words, Domitian paused, as if in thought, and a thrill passed through every guest there. Even Piso himself could not hear his unhappy kinsman's name without some visible emotion.

"Helvidius made himself completely intolerable," continued Domitian, after a brief pause, as he took a

napkin from the slave who offered it, and dipped his fingers in the golden bowl which another slave was holding for him. "He was always insulting my father, the divine Vespasian, and he had to put him to death at last. Some people only take advantage of a Prince's clemency. Well, *Patres et Conscripti*, it grows late—let us to the Circus, to see what sort of a diversion they have provided for my poor Romans."

CHAPTER II.

A JEST OF DOMITIAN'S.

The guests, who still saw the Sword of Damocles swinging in the wind which made the torches flicker, followed Domitian out by the door at which he had entered, and up a very narrow stair, which presently brought them out upon a small landing. Here, a door suddenly opening in the wall, they found themselves in the great Banqueting-hall of the Palace. The torches gleamed fitfully on the golden beams of the roof, and on the rich hangings of the walls, the granite columns, and the magnificent pavement inlaid with porphyry and peacock-stone. The cushions of the couches had been removed, and the fixed tables were empty; the footsteps echoed hollow as the imperial train crossed the daïs—raised high above the body of the hall—and passing out between the columns, entered a nymphaeum, almost as spacious as the hall itself, and full of the sound of falling water, which could also be distinctly heard in the Banqueting-hall. This came from many trickling cascades,

cunningly led down mossy steps and rocks grown over with water-loving plants; while a beautiful fountain, now silent, kissed, when at play, the shining limbs of water-nymphs. At this time of the year, the nymphaeum struck deadly chill, and the white marble which lined it gleamed like the snow on cold Algidus behind the great columns of *giallo antico* which supported the open roof, in the dark void of which Piso saw the stars shining.

They went on, sometimes by corridors, sometimes crossing courts where fountains trickled, until they passed through a room furnished as a library, and suddenly emerging on a crescent-shaped portico (which Piso recognized as that in front of the Palace of Augustus), heard a great roar of voices, and cries of wild beasts, and saw a dusky glare of lights, and felt the air hot and stifling, as the breaths of two hundred and fifty thousand people, and the hotter breaths of ten thousand lamps rose up from the Great Circus just below.

The portico was furnished with stone seats, on which cushions had been laid, with a raised seat in the centre for the Emperor. Here reclined Domitia with her ladies round her.

"Tell me, Piso, does Stella's entertainment do us honour?" asked the Emperor, as he stood looking down into this seething caldron.

"It is, I think, such as no other country could show, Caesar," answered Piso. "Not even, I believe, the magnificent Orient."

It was indeed an extraordinary spectacle. The whole of the valley between the hills was illuminated by means of great fires of fragrant wood and cressets so arranged as to produce a symmetrical effect. Indeed, one might have imagined a city with walls and towers of fire. Thousands of lamps hung round the whole circle of the podium, and other lamps fixed on poles marked out the "wedges," or divisions of the seats, so that the intervals of the stairways showed as lanes of light. The Circus had been burnt down in Nero's fire, and rebuilt by Vespasian—the new stone showed dazzlingly white in the lamplight. A cloud of smoke and dust hung in the air, and increased the strange and unreal appearance of the scene. The Circus was so crowded that, except upon the podium itself—where aristocratic late-comers were still hastening to their seats—nothing could be seen but dense masses of faces, rising up to the attics. A tremendous roar of voices came up from this enormous multitude. From where Piso stood, the whole of the arena, and almost the whole ellipse of the Circus itself was visible; but the Pulvinar of the Gods, being on the side next the Palatine, was not seen, nor was the Emperor's seat. But opposite, the tribune erected on

the podium for the Editor of the Show, with Stella sitting there in his curule chair, was a centre of light.

The arena was turned into a mimic forest, with rocks, trees, and streams—but on a far larger scale than the scene in the Death of Orpheus. Bands of hunters, armed with spears, javelins, and nets, were engaged in a chase which was almost real enough to deserve the name of sport. As Piso looked, a panther sprang from a rock, and felled a hunter to the earth, but was the next moment transfixed by a spear.

"There sits all Rome," said Domitian, pointing to the rows of faces, which coloured fires were just then making ghastly. "Hark! how they applaud! What is it they are shouting?"

"They say, 'Honour and thanks to our victorious Germanicus, and to Stella!'" said Crassus, who had been vainly trying for some time to attract the Emperor's attention.

But Domitian looked coldly at him, and turned again to Piso.

"Poor wretches! I believe they are well-affected to me," he said; "but they are credulous, and can be led astray by artful men. There is that fellow of yours, for instance, Piso—Demetrius the Cynic—I call him yours, because he lives so near you at Baiae, and is so often your guest. He, now, is an old rogue; and the Tyanean is another. They have dared, as

you heard for yourself, to bandy about the respectable name of our good old Nerva—of whom I fear the Gods will soon deprive us, for I hear the astrologers have discovered that a mortal sickness threatens him. And that reminds me, Piso, that some one said your daughter was taken with a faintness to-day, from the cold of our Roman climate."

Piso suspected some innuendo in all this; but he replied that his daughter had lately suffered from the Campanian fever, and was not yet re-established.

"She is of marriageable age, is she not?" continued Domitian. "I must see her. We must find an alliance for her worthy of her birth. And, hark ye, Piso, I would not let her be too much with our cousin Flavia Domitilla. I shall have to issue another edict—these foreign superstitions must be checked, or we shall have them spreading, as they did in Nero's time, to the Palace itself."

In talk like this—apparently friendly, and even confidential, but to Piso full of vague hints and threats—Domitian kept Piso beside him, while the roar of the Circus rose louder and louder, and the clouds of smoke and dust hung thicker over the valley, and far above it all the stars slowly wheeled round to the west.

To Aemilia, wandering about the house in uncontrollable suspense, and recalling with terrible clearness

every circumstance calculated to give her fears a definite shape, there came the faithful Tryphosa, to say that Calpurnia could not sleep, and wished to see her.

Aemilia found Calpurnia lying wide awake, with shining eyes, and Tertia and her cat both curled up asleep beside her.

"I kept Tertia because I was cold—and there are noises in this house, mother," said Calpurnia. "I dreamed that the doors burst open again, and there were soldiers in the atrium. I always dream that now, when I have the fever. Where is my father?"

"Did you not know? He is supping with the Emperor," replied Aemilia, with a calmness which surprised herself—and it seemed to her that this had happened before—that she had said these very same words before.

"No?" exclaimed Calpurnia, lifting her head from the pillow, and making Pasht unclose her eyes for a moment. "Supping with the Emperor? Then, mother, all is well, and our fears have been groundless!"

"Youth is forgetful of all but hope," thought Aemilia, "and it is well it is so, for fear soon enough asserts his dominion over us."

"Then you can stay with me till he returns," said

Calpurnia. "I cannot sleep. When I shut my eyes, I see all the rows of faces, and the beasts crawling along the sand." Calpurnia shuddered. "I wish one could have Shows where no one was killed. Mother, why are Christians hated more than any one else? I know that they hate mankind—but do not the Cynics hate mankind too? And yet one never sees a Cynic exposed to the beasts, does one?"

"The Philosophers have often been banished," said Aemilia, very unwilling to pursue this subject.

"Yes; but they do not throw them to the lions," said Calpurnia, persistently. "Even Demetrius was not thrown to the lions."

"Never mention his name in Rome, Calpurnia!" said Aemilia, hastily. "He is suspected of being engaged in a plot with Apollonius, and any one who has ever spoken to him is suspected too."

"That is very hard," said Calpurnia. "I wonder——" She stopped, rather confused.

"What do you wonder, my daughter?" asked Aemilia.

"Oh, nothing, mother dear," replied Calpurnia. "I was thinking of something else." Calpurnia had been just going to say, "I wonder whether Theophila knows Demetrius?"

"Did you ever consult an astrologer, mother?" she asked presently.

"Never, my child. I think I would rather not know if evil is coming."

"But it might be good that was coming," said Calpurnia, eagerly; "or, if it was bad, you might be warned in time."

"No," said Aemilia; "the prophecies of magicians seem all alike in this, that we can never escape the danger. When people have tried to escape it, they have only run into it."

"Is it true that Apollonius sacrificed a boy, to inspect his entrails, and see if Nerva was to be Emperor?"

"No; I do not believe there is any truth in it at all," replied Aemilia. "It is ridiculous to think of Nerva being Emperor—a sickly old man—and so mild and gentle too! It can only be his enemies who set such a report afloat—people that envy him his wealth, probably, and wish to curry favour with Domitian by accusing somebody or other."

"He has an imperial nativity, however," observed Calpurnia.

"Who told you that, child? I conjure you, by the Immortal Gods, never to say these things to any but me!"

"I heard it at Baiae," said Calpurnia. "Every one knows it. And Tryphosa has told me more about it here—she hears things from the water-carriers.

Do you believe, mother, that the Christians sacrifice babies?"

"Always harping on the Christians, child! What are they to you?"

"They are something, mother dear, if our Aulus has become one of them," said Calpurnia, turning her mother's indiscreet confidence against her. "And though they say that Flavius Clemens has turned Jew, I heard a woman say he really is a Christian."

"I ought never to have told you, Calpurnia! For mercy's sake, never let your father know I did! And as for Flavius Clemens—— "

"Oh, every one in Rome knows *that*," said Calpurnia. "At least, the man at the hot-water shop told Tryphosa that it was *whispered* everywhere. I wonder if it is true? I cannot believe that either Aulus or Flavius Clemens would sacrifice a baby. But Uncle Arulenus says only the lowest of the people ever become Christians." Calpurnia seemed to fall into deep thought. Her mother hoped she had fallen asleep; but suddenly she opened her eyes, and, looking full at her mother, said, "What does death seem to you to be like, mother? To me, it seems like a long, long passage—like the Grotto at Pausilypum—only *dark*. There are a few lights just at the entrance; but it grows darker and darker, till all is dark. Oh, mother, I wish we need not die!"

"Why do you think of these things, child? Are you feeling worse to-night?" asked Aemilia, in alarm.

"No, mother; but I have seen so many men killed," said Calpurnia, sadly. "They were only gladiators, and murderers, and thieves, and such people, I know; but yet even *they* must think sometimes about death, I suppose. Though Tryphosa says the gladiators sup together, and are very merry, the night before a combat. Mother, what do *you* think death is like?"

"Like going out alone into a cold winter's night, —like those in Britain—away from all I love," said Aemilia. "Why speak of it, child? You are young —there will be time enough for such thoughts, if you must think them. But why think at all of what we cannot delay for a single hour, with all our thinking? I have heard many Philosphers talk about the chief good; but not one of them ever said that the chief good was never to look forward beyond to-day."

"Oh! but, mother, I am always looking forward!" cried Calpurnia. "I am always wondering what will happen——"

"That is while you are young, my daughter. I dare not look forward. If I could have my wish, it should be that to-morrow should never come!"

"Mother! Do you not wish to see Caius—and Aulus—again?"

"Yes!" said Aemilia, involuntarily stretching her

arms as if to embrace them. "But they are well where they are. Here, they might—— But, hark! there is your father returned!"

Aemilia, not believing her own words, hurried, as quickly as her trembling knees would allow, towards the atrium. It was true, however—there stood Piso, pale, but alive! Aemilia ran to him, and fell weeping into his arms.

"Oh, what a whole age of suspense I have endured!" she said, when he had drawn her into the safe retirement of the library. "What has happened? Where have you been?"

"I have supped with Domitian," replied Piso. "If that may be called a supper which was rather such an entertainment as is offered to the Manes at a silicernium. And, indeed, when he dismissed me, he said, in that peculiar tone of his, which means one knows not what—'You may consider, if you please, Piso, that these are the Parentalia for our lamented Agricola, at whose obsequies, as you know, I could not be present.'"

Just then, a servant announced a message from the Emperor. Aemilia sank back almost fainting in her chair, and even Piso turned paler.

It was only one of the Palace servants, with a little boy dressed in a gay tunic, holding a silver pillar and a dish.

"Health, illustrious Sir," said the man, with a respectful salutation. "Our Lord and God the Emperor sends you this boy, whom you saw lately disguised as a negro, but who has been washed and clothed for your acceptance; and also the silver pillar and the dish which you deigned to use at table this evening."

CHAPTER III.

TOWN TALK.

As soon as the three days' Shows were over, Piso's friends hastened to visit him, and with Piso's friends came all the friends of Agricola who were still in Rome. Agricola's widow had gone to join her daughter and son-in-law, and Piso heard the details of Agricola's last days from one of his freedmen. They lost nothing in the telling.

"Have you not heard," he whispered, with horrified countenance, "of the poisoned needles? Not only here in the City—it has been done all over the world! It is a barbarian poison, brought from the Golden Chersonese—some say from the Seres. They dip needles in it, and if you are scratched with these needles—but so much as a prick will do it—you die. People don't know what ails them. Oh, nothing is easier than to poison people nowadays! Locusta was nothing to what can be done now! My revered Patron was murdered, Sir, and he would have been

murdered before, if he had not refused the Government of Asia. Did not Caesar"—here the freedman glanced apprehensively around him—"did not Caesar send to Asia and put Cerealis to death, because he was *going* to revolt? That's what he said. And if Agricola had gone, he would have said *he* was going to revolt. No Governor's life is safe, Sir, since Saturninus revolted—Caesar suspects them all now."

Along with the persons he was glad to see, Piso was pestered by a class of people with whose attentions he would willingly have dispensed. That most contemptible specimen of mankind, the parasite, had reached his full development in Rome. He was to be found not only among the needy and embarrassed—persons of equestrian rank were not ashamed to become hangers-on to great men's establishments. The ancient and honourable relations between Patron and Client had degenerated into a system of the coarsest flattery on one side, and grudgingly-given alms on the other. Persons whom Piso scarcely knew by sight hammered at his knocker and rang his bells before it was well daylight. They swarmed into his house, and would have invaded his bedroom—such was their eagerness to embrace him—had he not anticipated them by hastening out to greet them. They kissed him with mouths reeking with garlic, as they uttered fulsome vows for his

health and prosperity. He could not get rid of them —they had, they protested, no greater pleasure in life than waiting upon the illustrious Lucius Piso, and they devoted any business they might by chance have anywhere else to the Infernal Gods, and prayed that they might perish before they neglected the interests of so illustrious a Patron! They mobbed him when he went out, they accompanied him on his visits, and he was obliged to resort to stratagem to be quit of them even for an hour. Some of these importunate persons actually were Clients of his house; but a considerable number of them were mere adventurers, on the watch to greet any rising sun, and Piso's apparent favour with the Emperor had pointed him out as a Patron to be cultivated. Here in Rome, too, an impression prevailed that Piso might one day be Emperor. His banishment was only a proof of his importance. As for Flavius Clemens, he probably would decline the Empire if he dared.

The life of Flavius Clemens had been so full of tragedy that it was no wonder if he was somewhat graver than other men. His father was old Flavius Sabinus, Vespasian's elder brother and faithful partisan, who was cut to pieces by the Vitellian mob on the palace steps, the day the Capitol was stormed. His own elder brother, Titus Sabinus, was the husband of Julia, Titus's daughter. Domitian, who

just then had quarrelled with Domitia about Paris, was in love with Julia, and was looking for a pretext to get rid of Sabinus, when the herald in proclaiming him Consul made a slip, and said, "Imperator." It was enough. Sabinus was put to death for treason, and Domitian was free to add incest to murder. All this might well disgust Clemens with mankind; and when it was reported that he had turned Jew—man-haters, as every one knows—this was the view taken of it by the philosophical. Some, more acute still, suggested that he had perhaps embraced Judaism as a convenient excuse for withdrawing from the slippery paths of public life. Domitian was a very clever fellow, reasoned these critics—he knew that if a man was not doing one thing, he was doing another, and he liked to know *what* precisely a man was at—when that man was great enough to think of making himself greater still. There was Lucius Piso now—how often Domitian had remarked on the occupations of *his* retirement. Piso, it seemed, was become a famous farmer, like his ancestors, was an authority on vines and olives, and had improved on Pliny's graft. A good safe taste this, and accordingly Domitian had let him alone. Depend upon it, Flavius Clemens had put on Judaism by way of a mask. If he had called himself a Christian now, it would have been different—Christians could *not* be

tolerated. Not that the speaker—who was no other than Cotilus—(he was conversing with a ferret-faced young man, who looked like a lawyer, as they walked up and down in the Portico of the Hundred Columns, after the bath) had ever been able to see why turning Jew was tolerated either—unless perhaps because poor little Poppaea did so. But just now one may be anything one likes, except a philosopher or a Chaldaean. When it is the Jews' turn to be banished again, we shall see what sort of a Jew Flavius Clemens is. A poor-spirited fellow, mark my words! If he had had the courage of a mouse, we should have heard of a conspiracy long ago. Though, to be sure, now his sons are actually adopted, he may think it wise to let well alone. It *is* whispered, you know, that our Caesar has known from his youth he will not pass his forty-fifth year. Oh, of course, we all *hope* he will. If prayers can keep him among us, he'll reach the age of the divine Augustus. Fulvia—you know the enchanting Fulvia—is gone up to the Capitol now, to offer a sacrifice for his continued health and prosperity. Still, you know, one never *does* know what *may* happen, you know. And for my part, I *can't* understand Piso. *Is* he conspiring? *Why* was he banished? To weaken Agricola's party? Well, that's a reason, certainly. But *has* he an understanding with Nerva? You know Nerva *has* got

an imperial Nativity? Fact, I assure you! Enough to shake one's faith in the stars, as you say. By-the-by, ever hear that *Trajan* had a presage in his Consulship—three years ago, you know? Yes; and Glabrio had one too, but Glabrio's was unfavourable. Wonder if Caesar knows?

What *do* you think of the affair of Apollonius? Fact that Philolaus met him at Aricia! Wonder whether Piso's recall had anything to do with it? To do with what? Why, with Apollonius's trial—or with his vanishing—whichever you like. The question is—*is* there a plot? And, if there is, *who* is in it? If you ask my opinion, there are plenty who would be in it, if they dared—but they *don't* dare. At least, that's what *I* think. And Publius Crassus, for one. Crassus would, I rather fancy, like the chestnuts very well, but he is not the man to put his own paw in the fire. Lucius Piso, now—they say he did great feats in Britain—was quite in Agricola's confidence. He *can't* be well affected to Domitian, if you come to look at it, my dear Tranquillus—he *can't*, you know. But I confess these whispers about Nerva puzzle me. Are they a blind, to cover the real thing? Or do they put *him* forward, because no one can possibly be afraid of *him*, and he can't live long, and they think if *he* were proclaimed Emperor—by way of interregnum—all would acquiesce; and then, *afterwards*, you see,

the worthiest competitor could be brought forward? You know the story of Darius, I dare say? Well, as I have said before, I wonder what are the *real* sentiments of Lucius Piso, and how much truth there is in the plot of Nerva and Apollonius!

While Cotilus was talking thus—somewhat imprudently—to young Suetonius Tranquillus, under Agrippa's Portico, Piso and Aemilia were paying a visit to Flavius Clemens, who now lived in a wing of Tiberius's Palace, on the Palatine.

Piso found Clemens with his wife and children. The boys were presently fetched away to attend Quintilian's lecture, and the ladies retiring for a confidential chat, Piso and Clemens were left alone.

CHAPTER IV.

FLAVIUS CLEMENS.

Flavius Clemens, with the Flavian breadth of shoulder and looseness of limb, had less than the Flavian vigour. His features, which recalled those of the Emperor Vespasian, were softer and more refined than those of the rugged old Sabine. A slight stoop helped to give him a scholarly air, and, indeed, he had always been a patron of the Arts and of learned men.

As they talked together, Piso was more and more aware of a great change in Clemens. He looked older, more dignified; but it was not that. There had in former days been an indecision and infirmity of purpose apparent in him. He had seemed to be an amiable, yet embittered, restless, and disappointed man, who would eagerly discuss a matter, and then suddenly grow listless—a man of an upright and gentle disposition, but wanting in vigour and persistence, and with few settled opinions on any subject.

The love he bore his wife, Vespasian's granddaughter, seemed the one strong and fixed thing in him. A certain mental indolence—the result of calamity and disappointment, acting on a too gentle nature—had kept him dallying and trifling even with those pursuits which chiefly interested him. But now there was a new seriousness, a settled purpose, in his eyes, and a patient fortitude, as of a man who expects the worst, but does not dread it. Piso might not have seen all this, if he had not heard those astonishing reports; but having heard them, he looked curiously at his old friend, and asked himself how the patron of Quintilian could have been imposed upon by a barbarous modern superstition? Clemens observed this intent gaze of Piso.

"Am I so changed, Lucius?" he asked, smiling. "Am I grown old? Speak—I shall not be offended. A man who has passed his ninth lustrum cannot play the youth any longer. Or am I grown proud, because I dwell in the House of Tiberius?"

"You look a little older, Clemens—and so doubtless do I—but there is another and a greater change, which I cannot describe, though I see it."

"At least you can tell me if it be for the better or the worse?"

"It is not for the worse, my dear Clemens," replied Piso. "But, if I must define it, I will say that

whereas, six years ago, when you were at Baiae, you appeared at once indifferent and ill at ease, you seem to me now to be more oppressed with care—or it may be, merely more thoughtful, and yet more tranquil."

"You observe as keenly as ever, Piso," said Clemens, smiling. "I *am* more full of care; for I am set on a slippery height, and walk amidst pitfalls. Yet I am more tranquil, because I have learned what to desire. But how is it with yourself, Lucius?"

"How should it be?" replied Piso, bitterly. "How is it with him who is compelled to stand aside from the race? Do you remember our old discussions? How say you? Are the Stoics right, or the Epicureans? What is the chief good? And when we know it, how can we attain to it? Tell me, for you smile like a man who thinks he has found the answer to a riddle."

"The riddle, Piso, is one not to be solved by the understanding," said Clemens.

"Do you think, then, with Democritus, that we know nothing—not even that we do know nothing?" said Piso.

"That is a good beginning for wisdom," replied Clemens. "But what think you yourself? What, Piso, is the chief good?"

"Alas!" said Piso, "I know not. To me life seems a nightmare, in which, when I would run, I

cannot walk. I love neither to look back nor forward, and yet the present hour drags with leaden feet. I occupy myself with many things—I am spending to-day in laying up store for to-morrow, and I shall spend to-morrow in laying up store for the day after. I take an infinite deal of pains in studying the thoughts of dead men, who when alive studied the thoughts of other dead men. And none of them knew any more about what they talked of than you and I. But all this while I am talking of philosophy, when I should congratulate you, Father of our future Caesars! May they be like their father—as virtuous, as unambitious! No wonder, Clemens, that your old discontent has taken flight!"

"And do you think," said Clemens, looking fixedly at Piso, "that the prospect of empire for my children has brought me this content?"

"Truly, no, Clemens," returned Piso; "this change in you seems to me to spring from some deeper source than outward circumstances—which, as Musonius used to tell us, are simply what we make them, and either good or bad as we take them."

"He was not far from the kingdom of heaven," said Clemens, but in so low a voice, and as it were speaking to himself, that Piso was not sure he had heard aright.

"It seems to me, Clemens," he said, "that the

Stoics go too far in demanding that we shall be indifferent to pain and pleasure—a thing impossible, and almost impious, since Nature has endowed us with senses. Our eyes desire and love the light, and to say, 'The light gives me no more pleasure than the darkness,' seems to me to be an act of ingratitude to the Gods, if there be Gods."

"You are right, Lucius," said Clemens. "The outward light is good—good in itself, as a creature of God, and yet better as a symbol of the True Light. God hath not disdained to call sky and earth and sea His witnesses. Who are we, that we should despise the witnesses of God? 'His invisible things are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Divinity.'"

"Do you quote from an Orphic Hymn?" asked Piso.

"No," replied Clemens. "I quote from a Jewish Doctor, a pupil of the learned Gamaliel, of whom you have heard."

"Truly, Clemens, to teach that God made the world, and that therefore we may take pleasure in it, seems to me a wiser doctrine than the Stoics' contempt of all save the soul herself. And it is certainly a much easier one to put in practice."

"'The yoke is easy, and the burden is light,'" said Clemens. "'Every creature of God is good, if it be

received with thanksgiving.' And again it is written, 'Neither were they thankful.'"

"What you say is reasonable, Flavius, and it reminds me of Lucretius, where he says—

'Rise cheerfully from life's abundant feast.'

But let us not spend all our time in philosophical discussion. I cannot attain to the Stoics' height. I am deeply concerned in all that concerns my country. Pray tell me, if you know, what all this talk is about Nerva?"

"This only I can say," replied Clemens, "the very air is full of danger. Men dread each other—the spies of Domitian are everywhere, and he will never rest until he has destroyed every honest man in the Senate. With spectacles and largesses, he keeps the populace contented—and he rarely touches *them* —the Praetorians hold their swords at *our* throats. Do not, Lucius, be drawn into any plan, however promising it may appear. Leave Domitian to that God who hath said, 'Vengeance is Mine—I will repay.'"

"I know nothing of what may be going on in Rome," said Piso, hastily. "Some rumours, of course, have reached me, and some dangerous words have been uttered before me; but I have ever refused to listen. I am not of the stuff of which conspirators are made—I cannot stoop to murder—I am a soldier.

leave the stabbing of men in their beds to hired bullies—and to Domitian. I did not seek my recall, and I am not deceived by it. I am brought hither to be within sight of his eye—and within reach of his arm. He has slain Agricola, and my turn will soon come."

"Hush! hush!" said Clemens, glancing up to the beams of the ceiling. "For Aemilia's sake, and your children's, restrain your words. I tell you, Lucius, there is no word spoken in Rome that does not come to Domitian's ear. And hark you," he whispered, "of all men in Rome, trust least your cousin Crassus."

"He has asked me for my daughter in marriage," said Piso.

"For Calpurnia? Is she not betrothed to Atticus?"

"Not formally betrothed," replied Piso. "But there was something understood—on his return from Athens we were to speak of it; but, to tell you the truth, Clemens, Crassus brought me news from Greece which I distrust indeed, coming from that source, but which I must sift to the bottom, before I give him my daughter."

"Has he done some disgraceful act?" asked Clemens.

"Worse, if that be possible," said Piso, looking steadily at Clemens. "They tell me that he has turned Christian."

Aemilia, meanwhile, as soon as she and Domitilla had exchanged the compliments usual to friends who meet after a long absence, and had heard and narrated such news as might still be supposed to be news to either of them, came abruptly to the subject which had for so long never been out of her thoughts, and said—

"Domitilla, they say that you and Clemens are become Jews. Is it true?"

Domitilla turned deadly pale. "Aemilia!" she stammered.

"Oh!" said Aemilia, embracing her, "you need not fear me, my dear! Sure, you can trust me, Domitilla? Am I Fulvia, that I should go and tell everybody all I hear? Nor do I ask out of curiosity. I've a reason—a reason I must not tell. Oh, no! *I* am not going to become one! I worship the Gods, as I always have done, and a time of trouble and danger is not the time to deny them. And, indeed, it is not so much about the Jews I wish to know—it is the Christians." Domitilla turned paler than before. "Can you tell me if they sacrifice infants at their mysteries, and if they practise these unspeakable abominations we hear of? Lucius says that, even if they do, they are no worse than the Priests of Cybele. He has a great aversion to all Oriental deities and rites, and will not allow me to go to the Temple

of Isis. He says that Juno, and Minerva, and Ceres, and Diana, are the Goddesses women ought to invoke, and that the Mysteries are abominations. So now tell me, Domitilla, do you think the Christians do these things?"

"Perhaps you also believe, Aemilia, that they set Rome on fire?" said Domitilla, and Aemilia noticed that she spoke with bitterness.

"No; of course, we all know that Nero did it himself. Cornelius Tacitus has heard it from eye-witnesses, and it was always suspected."

"It is contrary to the religion of the Christians to do any kind of harm, to injure any one—even their enemies—or to commit the least act of unchastity," said Domitilla, very earnestly. "It enjoins a life as pure as that commanded by Pythagoras himself."

"You astound me, Domitilla; you seem to compare these Christians with the Philosophers."

"What is Philosophy, if not the Knowledge of God?" said Domitilla. "But why do you ask me these questions?"

"I may trust you," said Aemilia, and then she whispered in Domitilla's ear, "Crassus says that Aulus Atticus has become a Christian!"

CHAPTER V.

OLD FRIENDS.

Going next day to spend with Arulenus the hour before the bath, Piso was ushered into the library. There he found Gratilla—a noble and dignified matron, with hair already white—and with her a younger lady, who, on seeing Piso, sprang to greet him, flushed with pleasure, and then, suddenly turning very pale, burst into tears.

It was Fannia—Thrasea's daughter, Arria's granddaughter, Helvidius's widow. She had not seen Piso since her widowhood, and the sight of him recalled to her all the happiest and all the most dreadful days of her life. Nor was Piso much less moved. The figure of the venerable Thrasea, the guardian of the fatherless years of his youth, had never faded from his memory. That last heart-rending scene had been so often described to him by Arulenus, that he seemed to have been present at it. Fannia had left her father's corpse unburied to follow her husband

into exile. Helvidius himself had perished. All these terrible memories crowded into Piso's mind, and to him Fannia dared speak freely of them all.

"We were talking about the Panegyric," said Arulenus. "Senecio is to read it the day before the Calends of April. Do you remember, Lucius, how Demetrius tried to frighten me out of reading mine on Fannia's illustrious father? I confess, when Domitian played us that insolent trick the other night, I thought Demetrius was right. But when are we to make the acquaintance of your magnum opus, Lucius—your *History of the Senate?* Is it not time we heard the first book? How far have you brought it?"

"Only to the death of Caius Gracchus," replied Piso.

"The few pages you read to me at Baiae deeply impressed me," said Rusticus. "Lucius maintains, Fannia, that the history of the world may be compared to a river, which from time to time receives into its bosom other streams. Some of these streams merely swell a little the volume of water; but others, from some peculiarity in their quality, actually change the water in the river, so that, as it flows on, it preserves the characteristics of these tribute-streams —and perhaps is rendered muddy, or bitter, or of another colour for the rest of its course. Lucius says

that the Gracchi did this—imparting some of their own recklessness to following generations. And Caius Marius—whose naturally violent and unscrupulous disposition was, Piso considers, greatly influenced for the worse by his intercourse with the wily Jugurtha—infused a new and more bloodthirsty spirit into the commonwealth, together with a greater duplicity, so that Piso calls Jugurtha the Evil Genius of Rome. It is a strange idea; but he brings it forward very ably, and thinks that he has here found some explanation of the rapid and frightful degeneration of the State, and to some extent solved the mystery, why massacres, quite unknown during the less civilized times of old, became common just when learning began to be so much more widely spread, and the Arts to be cultivated—which are supposed to render men's minds less savage. Pardon me, Piso, for expounding your theory; but I wished to be sure I had rightly apprehended it."

"Perfectly, Arulenus," replied Piso, "and I am glad to hear it from you. Our own words sound more true when another utters them. Has not your step-son written something, Fannia? It was talked of at Baiae last year."

"It is an interlude, called *Paris and Oenone*," said Fannia. "It is intended for the stage; but it contains some allusions—to Julia, you know—and I

confess I am uneasy at its being made public. But he says that a man cannot speak under his breath for ever. But I have forebodings, and ever since I begged Senecio to write my husband's life, I have had dreadful fears lest perhaps I have drawn him into danger. I even begged him not to read it; but he, too, is grown impatient, and will not wait, though it is, I believe, whispered among the astrologers that Domitian will not pass his forty-fifth year. Have you heard it?"

"Would it were true!" said Gratilla.

"These prophecies sometimes fulfill themselves," observed Arulenus, drily. "But even this would give him near two years more, and he could in that time destroy us all."

Herennius Senecio read his Panegyric—to a very select audience, among whom, however, Fulvia and the constant Cotilus found a place. The assembly clapped—the fashionables with all the elegance of studied langour. Fulvia, who brought Micipsa with her, was resplendent in a saffron robe, over which fell the ample folds of a silken stole, shot with all the colours of a dove's wing. She frequently whispered to Cotilus, and seemed to desire that the whole assembly should observe how charmingly her golden locks—piled in a pyramid of curls—contrasted with his scented black tresses.

CHAPTER VI.

A SUPPER-PARTY.

Crassus was as good as his word—he invited Arulenus to supper to meet Regulus. Arulenus would have excused himself; but Crassus waylaid him at the bath, and told him that Piso was to be there. So Arulenus went, with some futile idea in his head of seeing that Piso was not entrapped—which was much as if a sheep-dog should set his wits against a fox. But he repented when he found that the company included the Chamberlain Parthenius and the poet Martial, and he was not mollified by seeing philosophy and learning represented by the courtly Quintilian, the amiability and integrity of whose private character could not atone in Arulenus's eyes for his public flattery of the tyrant. Arulenus held him but little more to be respected than Martial, though he so far yielded to the charm of Quintilian's manners, as to dislike him much less than he did the lively Spaniard.

The arrival of the two last-comers—Antonius

Primus and Vipstanus Messala—did not put him in a better humour; for the presence of the excellent Messala would prevent his snubbing Regulus, as he had resolved to do; and he could not see the purple visage of Primus—made more purple by its contrast with his thick white hair—without thinking of the sack of Cremona.

As soon as Martial saw Primus, he ran to him, and began paying him compliments which fairly turned Arulenus's stomach.

"I must show you a trifle I've made—'tis addressed to our good friend Caedicianus—on your portrait," he said. "I think I remember it—'tis but short. Our Germanicus deigned to hear it t'other day."

"Can you endure this, Messala?" whispered Arulenus.

"If we are to sup with Crassus, we must endure a great deal more," replied Messala.

The guests were assembled upon the terrace in front of the supper-room. It commanded a view of the Alban Hills, and of almost all Rome, with the long reaches of the Campagna lying far away to the west. The house of Crassus, on the most fashionable part of the Esquiline, was not very large, but it was furnished and decorated in the most sumptuous style permitted by good taste. The triclinium was so built that from its large windows the forest of Palaces

and Temples and Gardens on the Palatine—the great Colossus of Nero rising among them like a God just about to leave the earth and return to his throne among the stars—and in the valley below, the whole area of the Roman Forum—were set as in a frame. In the evening, the dust of the Forum rose up between the hills, and clung about the Palatine, until the sacred height where Arcadian Evander and his shepherds worshipped Pan, Protector of the sheep-folds, seemed to float in a golden sea.

"Supper is served, gentlemen," said Crassus, slipping his arm under Piso's, as his major-domo—a very dignified person—appeared in the doorway of the supper-room; while some pretty boys, dressed in gaily coloured tunics, asked each of the guests if he would please to vomit before supper?

Regulus and Parthenius accepted this hospitable offer; but the others declined—Primus remarking that he always took his emetic between the tables, while Martial said, laughing, that he was at present as empty as one of Panaretus's wine-jars.

"Then let us take our places," said Crassus, and led the way into the triclinium, at the upper end of which stood the sigma—the newest fashion in dinner couches, in form approaching to a semicircle, devised to promote greater sociability among the guests.

The tables—of which one was set by each guest—were of the most costly "tiger" and "peacock" woods, from the forests of Mount Atlas, with gold and silver feet, and the pavement was an exact copy of that famous mosaic made by Sosus of Pergamus, and called the "unswept hall," because the fragments of a feast were artfully represented—lettuce-leaves, crab-shells, fish-tails, fruit-rinds—and all so life-like, that Martial protested he had fallen and cut his shin with the crab-shell. The sigma itself was inlaid with tortoiseshell, the cushions, stuffed with swan's-down, were covered with richly embroidered Egyptian stuffs. Corinthian candelabra, of the finest brass, damascened with silver, stood at intervals along the walls; a many-branched lamp hung from the ceiling, and upon a magnificent silver sideboard stood a great candelabrum, representing Silenus, half-reclined at the foot of a vine, and attempting to squeeze the grapes into a cup. The truth of the attitude and the expression of drunken anxiety in Silenus's face and figure were worthy of a nobler subject, and the excessive grace of the branching vine showed that the artist had not chosen the figure of Silenus from lack of a sense of beauty. And if this work of art had not been enough to vindicate the taste of its possessor, a most exquisite statue of Venus occupied a place of honour between the columns, her perfect limbs thrown

into clear and soft relief against a magnificent Babylonian tapestry.

"To the Genius of Domitian!" said Crassus, pouring a libation with a golden ladle.

"To the Son of Pallas!" cried Martial, following his example.

Crassus had assigned to Piso the place of honour, below himself, with Primus above, remarking that thus he would find himself between the two greatest generals of the age.

"We are a small party; but I obey Varro, Lucius, and never exceed the number of the Muses," said Crassus, as he took an olive. "I hoped to have had Veiento here, but he is at the Palace. However, our admirable Martial supplies his place. Try the eggs, Lucius—the sauce is of Spanish mackerel, and ought to be particularly good, if the cook has obeyed my directions. Indeed, you should find it as pungent as the wit of our friend Marcus."

"You do me too much honour, Crassus," said Martial. "But if the sauce is Spanish, it must be good."

"One for the sauce, and two for yourself, Marcus," said Regulus, helping himself to some British oysters.

"Everything that comes from Spain is good," said Martial, tossing back his lank black hair, which was beginning to be streaked with gray.

"Except, I suppose, the Senecios," growled Regulus. "You will hardly, I suppose, begin to praise that truculent fellow, Herennius? You may keep your Rutupians to yourself, Crassus; oysters from Lucrinus are just as good. I am sure Piso agrees with me."

"They are certainly extremely good, Regulus," replied Piso, "and as we get them in three or four days, and the British in as many months, it seems to me they must be more wholesome."

"Ah, Piso, you are an authority," said Quintilian. "You rival your ancestors' fame, and deserve your cognomen. I hear your wines are renowned throughout Campania."

"We are happy in our climate, Quintilian—the earth in Campania seconds our efforts."

"My cousin Lucius was always so modest," said Crassus—"his only fault. Try the breast of this turtle-dove, Lucius. Parthenius, let me recommend you to try those mullets before the gudgeon. Villain, you have let the fish fall! Out of my sight this instant!"—this to an unhappy slave, who, in helping Parthenius to the still struggling mullet, had allowed it to fall upon the couch. "Hylas, bring a napkin."

The slave slunk off—to be punished to-morrow—and Hylas, a beautiful youth with golden hair, who alone of Crassus's slaves seemed to venture on any

liberties, restored the expiring mullet to the dish, and wiped up the spilt sauce; while Crassus, as courteously as if he had not just now been transported with rage, began to draw Piso's attention to the paintings of the ceilings and walls.

The triclinium, which was situated in the highest story of the house, for the sake of the view, had been redecorated by its owner in the newest style. Its walls were of yellow Numidian marble, with very handsome Corinthian columns of red Verona, grouped in threes, at intervals of about six feet. These intervals were filled with rich hangings, and above the columns there was a deep frieze, with the "Loves of the Gods" painted on it by that peculiar and ingenious method which produced what at a little distance appeared to be a fine picture, but, if approached too near, resolved itself into an unmeaning daub. This frieze was very vigorous, and singularly indecorous. It had formed part of the former decorations of the triclinium, and had been spared by Crassus, partly on account of the remarkable excellence of its execution, but also because it served as a kind of foil to the painting of the ceiling.

Crassus piqued himself on his taste. Nothing flattered him so much as when one of his guests dubbed him Petronius, and called him the Master of Caesar's revels. Domitian, it was well known, had

consulted him upon the decoration of the "Mica." And his own house justified his vanity. Every appointment of the feast was perfect—from the invisible flutes, which breathed melodies as lusciously soothing as the scent of lilies, to the film-like goblets, on thread-like stems, within which the old Mamertine —more precious than Falernian or Setine—gleamed like molten rubies, and the beautiful Greek slaves who waited upon the guests.

But the glory of the triclinium was its ceiling. Within a heavy cornice, very richly inlaid with ivory and gold, was a large centre panel painted with a Symposium of Gods and Goddesses, in which, if religion and morality were somewhat offended, art was triumphant. The grace and vigour of the drawing and the rich clearness of the colouring left nothing to be desired, and it differed from other representations of the same subject by an entire absence of the grossness which had become so common in decorative art. Indeed, the impropriety was of so subtle a nature, that only a very refined observer would have found it offensive. The artist had stripped off all that halo of divinity which the pious ancients fancied must still cling to the Deities of Olympus, even when they condescended to assume mortal semblance. He had done more—in some scarcely perceptible manner he had also stripped off that humbler halo of manhood,

which in civilized man generally veils the beast. Not that these Gods and Goddesses had anything brutal about them; on the contrary, they were all perfect types of human physical grace and beauty. But the artist had somehow divested them of all spiritual and intellectual glamour. He had contrived to give the banquet the air of a debauch, and the guests the air of revellers, and yet to avoid any touch of burlesque. Indeed, his Symposium would have been less offensive to both Piso and Arulenus—to whom Crassus took care to point out its merits—had the indecorum been more gross. The artist seemed to have laid himself out to show how much beauty there could be without elevation. What a triumph for Crassus, who derided the very notion of there being any spirit in man except those "animal spirits," in which the ancients vaguely personified the principle of life! And yet perhaps the most zealous disciple of the Old Academy might have been consoled, by observing the void left by this absence of the ideal.

Regulus praised the composition. "Yet, somehow, Crassus," he added, after a moment, "your Symposium is a disagreeable work. I do not know why; but I have an uneasy feeling while I look at it—as though a cold air were blowing on my naked body. I am half inclined to think your clever artist has made a mistake, after all. He should have been less

serious, or more so. He has left out all that is god-like, without giving us anything in exchange. These Gods of his are too human for beasts, and too beast-like for men. Whichever you take them for, they are incomplete. I like your frieze better—it is beastly, but confoundedly clever."

"You are very hard to please, Regulus," said Crassus. "For my part, I am quite satisfied with a painting which shows me the true use of the intellect."

"And what may that be, pray, Crassus?" asked Martial, leaning forward on his elbow.

"Can you ask, Marcus?" replied Crassus. "To teach us more exquisite pleasures than those the beast-like herd can know—to teach us how to feel—to show us the Art of Enjoyment, which is the sole end of our being—unless we are sour Stoics, who, having sickly stomachs that can't digest a good dinner, pretend, forsooth, that a good dinner is unworthy the attention of a wise man."

Most of the guests laughed at this. It greatly displeased Piso to observe that Quintilian was of the number.

"There may be some truth in that," remarked the great orator. "I have sometimes fancied that I could detect a bluntness of the senses in men who adopt that philosophy."

"Yet some of them have had a taste for magnificence," said Martial. "The Scipios for instance—and Seneca."

"The Scipios were my ancestors—I say nothing of them," said Crassus—who was, however, in no wise descended from that illustrious stock, unless he might count himself so by virtue of his cousinship to Piso. "But I demur to calling them Stoics. But Seneca—the less said about *him* the better. I gladly surrender him to the Stoics."

"Nay, Crassus, keep him. The Stoics do not desire him," said Arulenus, reddening a little. "There are pseudo-Stoics, as there are——" Rusticus was going to say, "pseudo-Neros;" but fearing lest this allusion should be misinterpreted, he said, "other impostors."

"Most true," said Crassus, as he carefully poured the wine-sauce over his wild-boar. "And talking of impostors—what do you think now, my dear Lucius, of that old rogue, Apollonius of Tyana? Depend upon it, there's more there than meets the eye! Inquiries are going on, however, and I hope we shall soon hear that something has been discovered!"

"He very nearly got our excellent Nerva into trouble," observed Regulus, with a swift, furtive glance at Piso.

"And how excessively rash of Umbritius to admit

to Caesar that Nerva has an imperial nativity!" said Crassus. "It is true he told him at the same time that Nerva has not long to live."

"If anything were wanting to show what rogues and impostors the mathematici are—Regulus, I know, believes in them—it would be this imperial nativity of Nerva's," said Martial. "They must be great fools too—to go and choose the least likely man in the whole empire for their idiotic predictions!"

"Their predictions might have cost Nerva dear," growled Primus, on whom the wild-boar had told —it, or the wine-sauce, had got into his face, which was purple at all times, but was now so swollen and discoloured that the veins seemed ready to burst.

"The well-known mildness of the Nervae," remarked Quintilian, in his conciliatory voice, "makes it impossible to suspect Marcus Cocceius of any desperate design."

"Nerva is a most respectable and sensible man," said Parthenius, "and not the man to make enemies."

"Oh, a most amiable old gentleman!" sneered Martial. "I dare swear he never killed so much as a fly."

"Hush, hush, Marcus!" said Crassus, winking at Parthenius.

"For my part, I think him an old fool," growled

Primus. "I cannot understand what Caesar sees in him, to show him so much favour as he does."

"Policy, my dear General," said Crassus. "Caesar knows very well that Nerva does not wish to conspire with anybody, but he knows also there are persons ready enough to conspire with Nerva, and he thinks the best thing is to keep Nerva under his own eye."

"If Caesar would take my advice," said Regulus, and his eye seemed to Piso to rest on Arulenus, "he would make a clean sweep of some of them. There are Senators—*Senators*, I tell you, Sirs, in whose houses seditious poems and plays are read to select audiences, and where it is hinted pretty plainly that Brutus did well in murdering the divine Julius!"

"So I have heard," said Crassus. "But I scarcely believe it—though, to be sure, the vanity of authorship will account for almost anything. *You*, however, my dear Quintilian, and you, Marcus, have reconciled Caesar to literature. Messala, too, who is an orator as well as a soldier—and"—here he glanced at Piso—"in fact, gentlemen, nowadays, everybody writes. No; we are not reduced to these anonymous scribblers. I did hear, however, that Juvenal has written something rather severe—very clever, I believe, but a *leettle* too strong, you know. By-the-by, they say he is gone to Egypt. Where is he, Marcus? *You* ought to know?"

"By Hercules! not I," said Martial. "But I believe he talked of going. His satire is, I think, only a castigation of the women. Pliny told me he had torn them limb from limb."

"If you'll take my advice, Martial," said Regulus, with a scowl—he had drunk a good deal, and was growing more arrogant and brutal every moment—"you won't be quite so intimate with Pliny. He'll get himself into trouble before long—he's every bit as bad as Senecio, and it may be awkward for those who are too thick with him. And I wouldn't advise you to scoff at omens; there's a great deal more in them than *you* can understand. Where did you get these martens, Crassus? They are excellent."

"They were sent to me straight from Pannonia," said Crassus.

"You should write an epigram on them, Marcus," said Regulus, "and say that ever since Caesar went to those parts, the martens have a sweeter flavour."

Most of the guests laughed at this.

"You are very silent, Lucius," whispered Crassus, when the conversation was for a moment interrupted by the entrance of another course—roast peacock, flanked by a dish of flamingoes' tongues, and another of geese livers. "Speak—your silence may be misunderstood."

CHAPTER VII.

VICINA JUBENT NOS VIVERE MAUSOLEA.

Having helped himself to a slice of peacock, Crassus began to press his hospitality on his guests, like a man with no heavier care on his mind than the tickling of their appetites. "Try the rough Alban, Parthenius," he said. "It is exactly fifteen years old, just come to its majority, and Symmachus swears it is very invigorating to the stomach. Arulenus, you eat nothing—pray taste these truffles—'tis a new way of dressing them. Messala, are you sure you prefer that sow's udder to turtle-dove? By-the-by, Regulus, I forgot to ask, when we were talking of Nerva, whether it is true that Apollonius has got clear off from Puteoli?"

"They say so—in a Sicilian ship," replied Regulus, as, daintily holding the breast of a turtle-dove between his finger and thumb, he stripped off the flesh. "He was there, they *say*—at Puteoli, I mean—the same day he disappeared hence. That, however, I for one

don't believe. But I happen to know that the old fox Demetrius—*your* friend, Piso—was at Antium with Telesinus a fortnight before the trial—no doubt, arranging for the escape. It would not have done to let Apollonius be condemned—he knows too much. Of course, his bold bearing at the trial was a part of the comedy. 'You act innocence, girt in armour more strong than triple brass, and all the rest of it—brazen it out, in fact—and we'll see you escape—if you should be condemned.' But, as you see, his boldness saved him so far that Domitian acquitted him."

"His undaunted replies made a great impression on Caesar," said Crassus. "You think, then, that his escape was pre-arranged?"

"Think! Why, of course it was," said Regulus. "Telesinus got all ready on the road—Demetrius had his Sicilian captain waiting at Puteoli. The whole thing is as clear as daylight. Caesar did the wisest thing he could—he acquitted him, but ordered him to be detained for further conversation. To have condemned Apollonius, after the evidence of an *alibi* which he gave—and which I suppose was genuine—would have been to drive the real conspirators to bay, and to precipitate their action."

"All the better, I should have thought," said Primus, who was, if possible, more purple still.

"Why, no," said Regulus; "not when you don't

know how far a thing has gone. Best feel your way a little. They will be in a mortal fright now—not knowing *how* much Domitian knows, yet suspecting he knows something—afraid to strike, lest he knows *all*. Now, in a conspiracy, to infuse doubt into the conspirators is to paralyse the whole thing."

"Gentlemen," said Crassus. "With your permission, I will retire to vomit."

"So will I," said Primus, whose countenance showed him to be greatly in need of some such relief.

"How do your illustrious pupils, Quintilian?" asked Regulus, when Crassus and Primus had left the room. "And what is all this about their father having become a Jew?"

"It is certainly untrue," replied Quintilian. "I am sure of it—for Flavius Clemens eats pork, which you know a Jew abhors. These reports have, I fear, been set afloat by some that would injure him with Caesar."

"It is said, though," persisted Regulus, his voice rising into the key in which he examined his witnesses, "that he and Domitilla have been seen coming home from quarters of the city whither no ordinary business would take them—from the Quarries, they say. Now, it is well-known the *Christians* hold their assemblies *there*."

"What! Regulus—do you think?" faltered Quintilian.

"I think nothing—I state a fact," said Regulus, snappishly. "I shall not tell Caesar—if that's what you mean. This is only the gossip of the town—there may be nothing in it—no more than there *may* be in the other reports about Herennius Senecio and Helvidius Priscus."

"Why, what is there about *him*, brother?" asked Messala, anxiously.

"Oh, nothing—nothing at all," said Regulus, sarcastically. He was in a bad humour. Arulenus had treated him with marked coldness, and Piso had scarcely deigned to address him. He was avenging himself by these sly hits at their intimate friends.

"A wise man does not desire to know what is said about him in the Forum," said Piso.

"Oh, for that matter," said Regulus, insolently, "they would do well to know—it might give them a warning to mind their p's and q's. If they don't, the skies will fall on them before very long, I rather fancy. And I'll tell you now, brother"—this was to Messala,—"that when I spoke of Senators who recite treasonable compositions, I meant—*among others*—Senecio and Helvidius."

Messala turned pale, Rusticus flushed, and Quintilian appeared much distressed at these words, into

which Regulus had thrown all the venom he was master of—and that was not a little. He saw the effect he had produced, and added, more viciously still—

"And greater personages too may find themselves in the same box, if they don't mend their manners very quickly."

Piso felt, rather than saw, that Regulus's small malignant eyes were fixed on himself, but he resisted the temptation to look up, and continued to eat his peacock with an appearance of such perfect unconsciousness, that Regulus was deceived, and believed Piso had either not heard or not understood his words. He resolved he *should* understand.

"Everybody now takes to scribbling," he said, with one of those livid looks so terrible to his adversaries. "As our host said just now, *everyone* writes. Those that are afraid to speak their mind in the Senate, write down their treasonable ideas at home, and read them to their friends. They compose biographies, and even histories, with no other object than to hold up Caesar—whom may the Gods preserve to the Empire!—to contempt and hatred, and to glorify the Senate, or the Gracchi, or anybody—it does not matter whom—so long as the Emperor is vilified."

"Very true, very true indeed," said Parthenius. "You take the right view, Regulus. But our Caesar

is not a man to be made a fool of. I think I *will* vomit, after all—this sauce is most delicious, but so rich, that after it one can hardly do justice to the sweets. I hear, Piso, that you have never laid aside the austerities of the camp—it was remarked at Baiae, I am told, that you never vomited at a banquet. Every man to his taste. I mean, by the favour of the immortal Gods, to do justice to our host's sweets."

So saying, Parthenius—on whose feet a servant had already replaced his slippers, left the dining-room, and Martial—who was a little frightened at the tone of Regulus—tried to turn the conversation, by praising the banquet.

"All Crassus's arrangements are perfect," he said —"absolutely perfect. There is everything to please the eye as well as the palate—and the ear too—how ravishing are those flutes, and yet how little they obtrude their melodies on our conversation! And everything that can offend is kept from view. I have dined at great men's houses—very great men, some of them—where, if a guest wished to vomit, he did so at table. At others, even when a guest *was* expected to retire, he was allowed to vomit in the anteroom—so that one heard him rooking till one retched one's self. There is nothing more disgusting than a banquet given by a new man—I vow to the Gods, I have been present at some which vied with Trimalchio's! And,

talking of Trimalchio, every one must be struck by the marvellous resemblance which our host bears to Petronius. He is, indeed, a new Petronius—still more accomplished than his prototype, because our age is even more highly polished than the age of Nero. Let us drink to him in his absence, gentlemen. To the New Petronius!"

"Now I am ready to renew the combat," said Crassus, coming in briskly at this moment, followed by Primus, whose eyes appeared ready to start from his head, although his face was a little less purple in hue.

"But what are you saying of Petronius?" asked Crassus, as he sank upon the cushions, and beckoned to Hylas to bring him wine.

"We were only drinking your health, Crassus, as the New Petronius," said Martial, "and saying that Petronius himself was a less accomplished master of pleasures than you are."

"Oh, come, that's too much, you know, Marcus," said Crassus, who, cynical as he was at all other points, was very open to flattery on this one. "I can't vie with Petronius, I can only imitate him."

"So closely, that you are indeed a second Petronius," said Martial.

"Our friend is resolved to earn his dinner," whispered Rusticus to Messala. "What impudent flattery! And what a parallel!"

"Hush!" replied Messala. "I wish he were content to be only the New Petronius—I suspect him of wishing to be the New Tigellinus. But Parthenius is watching us."

"By Hercules!" exclaimed Crassus, as he applied himself to a dish of fattened thrushes, "we ought to erect a statue in the Comitium to him that invented the emetic. The simplicity of the invention is sublime—by tickling one's throat for a moment with a red feather, one can renew the pleasures of hunger as often as one chooses! With a red feather, one can put to flight Satiety—worst enemy of Pleasure! Hylas, bring me the Setine. *Libo tibi*, feather of Father Bacchus! Renewer of Delight! Without thee, what were all our banquets? How brief their pleasures, how lasting their pains! Marcus, write us an epigram on the divine feather."

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"This is the golden hour!" said Crassus, holding up an amber cup in which the sparkling Setine mantled like burning gold. "The coarser pangs of hunger are appeased; the stomach—stupid, tiresome fellow—has been propitiated; he will let us alone, and allow the palate time to enjoy himself. Now we rest from our labours, and envy not the Gods themselves, as we sip the good Falernian."

"'Fill double cups——' How goes it, Marcus?"

Martial, nothing loth, repeated—

> "'Two cups, two double cups, Callistus mine,
> Fill high, fill high, with good Falernian wine!
> And thou, dissolve the summer-snow, Alcime!
> Lavish the momum on my dripping hair,
> And crown my brows with wreathèd roses fair!
> Lo! Cæsar's sepulchre says, "Live to-day—
> Because the Gods themselves can pass away!"'"

"Bah! Why speak of sepulchres, Marcus? You have spoilt a good epigram—it should have ended at the roses. Let us drink, and forget that we die. Hylas, fresh wreaths—fill ten cups for 'Domitianus'—and give me ten kisses, Hylas, for 'Germanicus.'"

Piso, who had usually seen his cousin cold and cynical, was somewhat surprised at this genial mood, and reflected with some contempt on the value of that geniality which is poured down a man's throat along with the bright Setine and the rich Falernian. But even as the thought passed through Piso's mind, another change came over Crassus.

"Look, Sirs!" he cried. "There is a fair prospect, if you will!" He pointed to the window, through which was seen the Palatine, at the most exquisite moment of a spring sunset—the rose-tipped roofs and towers rising from the tender amethystine shadows which wrapped their base. "Hail, centre and heart of the Orb of the World!" cried Crassus, holding his crystal cup on high. "Hail, Hill of Evander, whence

Rome rules the habitable earth! Palatinus, I drink to thee!" He drank, and dashed the costly crystal to the ground. "Break your cups!" he cried. "Let no other healths be drunk from cups that were emptied to the sacred name of Rome!"

Piso—himself carried away by the words, and by this vision of *Gloria Mundi* spread out before his eyes —saw a light come into Crassus's face—a look of intense desire and earnest passion, such as he had never yet imagined that cynical voluptuary could feel. The guests broke their myrrhine cups, and, fired by the toast, the conversation grew louder and freer.

"Look again, Lucius, before the sunset fades," whispered Crassus. "Will you let this son of a Sabine farmer sit there, and play Sextus Tarquin with you? Have you no ambition, Lucius? Is not the Calpurnian line as ancient as the Julian? Shall we let this low-born impostor sit in the seat of Romulus much longer? Lucius, I could give you the empire of the world, if you would listen to me!" Then aloud, "Hylas, put more snow into the Setine"—and, turning to his guests—"This is my Cousin Lucius Piso's *coena adventitia*—let us drink to him. Hylas, fill six cups for the letters of Piso's name."

"Lucius!" said Parthenius, tossing off a goblet of the Setine.

"Lucius!" said they all.

Crassus continued to drop such words in Piso's ear. While the Cup of the Good Genius was being carried round, he whispered, "'Tis you, Lucius, and you only, who might be the Good Genius of Rome. Nerva is too feeble, too old, and only of Cretan extraction too—Trajan is a plain soldier, and a Spaniard—provincials both. *We* come of the great old houses—of the Cornelii, the Claudii——"

"Hush, Publius!" said Piso. "These words are dangerous—you may be overheard."

"Who will suspect me, when Parthenius is here?" said Crassus.

The talk grew louder. The guests laughed more, and Parthenius, far gone in his cups, asked Crassus if Chione might not sing them a song.

"Send us Chione, Hylas," said Crassus; and presently a very beautiful Greek girl entered, dressed in a flowing robe of some exceedingly thin silken material, which was fastened upon the shoulders by two magnificent silver clasps, leaving the arms entirely bare. The girl's complexion was dazzlingly white—so white as to resemble marble—and her arms and her pillar-like throat might have been models for a sculptor. A great quantity of bright yellow hair was wound loosely round her head, and fell in thick curls down her back, slightly confined by a silver ribbon. Silver armlets in the form of serpents adorned her shapely

arms, and, as she moved, the jewels with which they were set flashed fire. The features of this girl were purely Greek—the straight brows and the nose in a line with the forehead, the curved lips, and short, round chin. She had darkened her eyebrows and eyelashes, and her peculiarly light-blue eyes produced a very strange effect in consequence—especially when she became excited—then they gleamed like clear glass with a light behind them, and increased her likeness to a marble statue.

"Strike the lyre, divine Erato!" said Crassus, lolling back on his cushions. "Strike, and sing us one of the songs which Sappho made to Phaon."

The Greek girl shot an odd glance at Crassus out of those curious light-blue eyes, and leaned with a careless statuesque grace against one of the columns—where the tones of her glistening robe and the rich pallor of her neck and arms harmonized so finely with the labyrinthine lines of the tapestries and the warm pink of the marble, that she seemed a part of the wall against which she stood. Slowly she struck the lyre, twanging it softly, and drawing forth wild and melancholy notes—in whose melancholy there lurked an almost gleeful defiance. It was a reckless song, breathing a passion of desire and regret, and the singer's voice was rich and sweet, and chimed in thrillingly with the sweet clear tinkle of the strings.

As she sang, her hair loosened itself, her bosom heaved, and the emeralds in the serpent's head shot fire—and so did Chione's strange transparent eyes. Her voice rose and fell in a rhythm on which the listeners seemed to float—as a little ship floats on great waves, and rides up and down, is tossed on the billow's crest, and flung down into the trough, and then, slipping before the wind, feels her sails fill out, and hears the water rushing below her keel, and is borne on, in the arms of the wind, over the open sea.

"Let us live!" sang Chione, and struck a joyous chord on the lyre.

"'Let us live, while live we may
Soon the night shall end the day,
Soon the summer pass away,
Soon the man grow old and grey;
Fires of love soon cease to burn,
Hearts lie cold within their urn;
Yesterday will ne'er return—
Who to-morrow may discern?
Let us live, while live we may,
Soon the night shall end the day!

"'Let us love, while love we may!
Then come love me, love, to-day—
For of all that knows decay,
Love's the shortest-lived, I say.
Short and sweet is love, alas!
Like a shadow on the grass,
Like a face seen in a glass.
Snatch the hour, then, e'er it pass—
Let us love while love we may—
Soon we, too, grow old and grey,
Soon the night shall end the day!'"

CHAPTER VIII.

INTER POCULA.

The wine-cups went round, and again and again the voice of Chione chanted the sweetness and fleetingness of pleasure. Sweet, heavy odours floated about the room, kept cool by the heap of melting snow in the great silver wine-cooler. A warm languorous twilight invited the guests to exchange the acuter enjoyment of the appetite for the subtler delight of conscious repose. Long after night had settled down, Crassus looked around at his guests. Primus and Parthenius had fallen asleep. Regulus was attentively watching Chione. Quintilian, with his air of well-bred approbation, was idly marking time with his jewelled fingers; while Martial, lying flat upon his back, was jotting down something in his tablet-book. Arulenus and Messala were deep in a whispered conversation, of which only an occasional word reached the ear of Crassus.

The servants had removed everything but the fruit

and wine, and had left the room—except Hylas, who lay coiled up on a leopard's skin on the floor. Suddenly Chione, with dishevelled hair—on which Regulus had flung a chaplet, burst into a rollicking anacreontic in praise of love and wine. The guests roused themselves, and joined in the chorus with a great rattling of goblets and beating on the tables—

> "'Philosophy, thou'rt too divine!
> I'm content with love and wine.
> Leave the grey-beards to their crazes,
> While of love I sing the praises.
> Love and wine make Gods of men,
> Crown the cup, and drink again!'"

"Lucius, can you hear me?" said Crassus in Piso's ear. "I have much to say—you would not hear me at Baiae—the danger is nearer now; but there is still time. Lucius, I ask you once more for Calpurnia."

It seemed to Piso that a covert threat lurked in the words, and all that Crassus went on to say confirmed his old suspicion that an attempt was being made to terrify him into yielding. Domitian was, said Crassus, in a state of alarm and exasperation at many things which had happened since the death of Agricola—and again Crassus hinted darkly that Agricola's death had been intended, if not compassed. Whatever Regulus might say, Apollonius had *not* disappeared by Domitian's connivance, and Domitian was the last man in the world not to realize the meaning of the fact

that a person on his trial for treason could vanish from the very tribunal, from under the Emperor's very eyes. Such a thing could only have been done by the help of people in authority—and its complete success pointed to a wide-spread conspiracy. In whose interests that conspiracy was being hatched was a question of vital import to every man in Rome great enough to be suspected of being its object. "I am myself suspected, Lucius—Domitian's manner to me alarms me," he whispered. By this time, Parthenius and Primus lay snoring heavily on the floor, their heads carefully propped on cushions. Crassus spoke close into Piso's ear, in the lowest whisper. "These beasts can't hear me," he said. "We are safer thus, than if we were alone. Yes; Domitian is going to strike, and he is seeking whom to strike. Nerva is a mere stalking-horse—and Domitian knows it. Men don't conspire for such as Nerva. I dare say he will swoop down on Nerva—if only to discredit the astrologers—but he looks beyond Nerva. Herennius Senecio recited his panegyric the other day—and you were there. These panegyrics drive Domitian mad. Did you hear Regulus? By-the-by, if ever you come to trial, you are lost if Regulus is against you. He can't be *for* you—he never defends in such cases. But we might get him engaged elsewhere. Anyhow, I strenuously advise you *not* to press for a trial."

"Publius," said Piso, "I do not know why you speak thus to me. I have never invited such a conversation."

"Hush! lower," said Crassus. "I speak thus to save us all. *I* shall be involved in your ruin. We must stand or fall together. Join me. Give me Calpurnia, as a pledge that you will not draw back. I ask no more. You may stand still, and *I* will act—— "

"Was it a messenger from you, Publius, that spoke to me in the Grotto of Pausilypum? It could not be yourself—you were then at sea. Yet, I could fancy I recognized not only the words, but the voice. Was it you?"

"Ask me nothing," whispered Crassus—as he spoke, he extinguished the lamp which stood on the table beside his elbow. "Ask me nothing. Know only that the presence of Demetrius so near Baiae, and your acquaintance with him—magnified a hundredfold by your enemies—that is, by your enviers—suffice to point you out as an accomplice in Apollonius's flight. I tell you, Domitian is preparing a blow. Give me Calpurnia, Lucius."

"It is impossible, Publius."

"Why impossible? Am I too old, or too low-born, or too poor? I am a Calpurnius, Lucius—let our two branches unite and form a mighty tree. Be the father of Emperors—— "

"Publius, I have already told you that I have other views for my daughter."

"What! Are you infatuated?" hissed Crassus—even then, however, never letting his voice rise above that lowest whisper. "Do you reserve her for Atticus the Christian? Perhaps you are one of them? That would account for your incredible contempt of all that is sweet in life——"

"The Gods forbid!" replied Piso. "Let us not quarrel, Publius. Suffer me to decline the proposals with which you honour me——"

"I suppose you look higher," hissed Crassus. "Young Vespasianus is still but a child, it is true; but at fourteen, he can marry——"

"Publius, you grow insulting," said Piso. "If you wish to fasten a quarrel on me——"

"On the contrary," said Crassus, "I wish to persuade you to the closest possible alliance with me."

"I have told you, Publius——"

"You tell me nothing! You give me no reason!" said Crassus, slightly raising his voice, but no one heeded him. "You say you will not give her to Atticus——"

"I never said that, Publius."

"Then you *will* give her to him. A madman, who has renounced his citizenship—it comes to that, you

know. What duties can he perform? And if he escapes the arena, he is lucky!"

"I can determine on nothing yet, Publius."

"That means you doubt my word. By the Gods, Lucius, you are the coolest cynic I ever knew! Yet they call *me* a cynic! You doubt your own kinsman——"

"I thought, Publius, you ridiculed the popular belief in family attachment?" said Piso, slightly roused. "I myself have heard you do so——"

"I now see that I was right," returned Crassus, with smothered hatred in his glance. "Still, it is decent to affect some respect for those of one's own blood—not to do so reflects on one's self."

"I will not take an irrevocable step in the dark," said Piso. "Not, indeed, that I need call it irrevocable," he added very bitterly, "for, with our excellent divorce-laws, nothing is easier than to dissolve a tie which has grown irksome."

"Oh! if that's what you fear, you may set your mind at rest," said Crassus. "Greatly as I admire Calpurnia, it is no less as *your* daughter that I wish to marry her. Ill as is your opinion of me, *I* have always entertained the greatest veneration for your person and character—you may not believe me, but, by the Gods, it is true! You are almost the only person I know in whom I have any belief. You,

I have always believed, mean what you say, and hold to your word. Should I have ventured on this dangerous talk with you had I not had the most implicit trust in you? Yet what trust have you placed in me in return?"

"I have no secrets, Publius," said Piso.

"I offer you empire," hissed Crassus—his lips touching Piso's ear.

Piso involunarily drew back a little.

"Think of it," continued Crassus, louder. "Let me know your decision as soon as you have come to it." Then, whispering again, "Look round you, Lucius, and see what men are, and ask yourself if it is so hard to govern them. See the men of action, overcome by a little wine and a pretty slave—by the Gods, Regulus presses her hand too hard—hospitality, Regulus, has its limits! Then the lawyers—Quintilian would smile on *you* as blandly as he does on Domitian. Regulus would denounce *your* enemies as virulently as he does *his*. The two honest men are lost in a philosophical discussion. Not one of these men, Lucius, is of the sort that strikes a decisive blow—except these two"—he pointed to Primus and the Chamberlain—"and what are they at the most? An intriguing slave, great in little undertakings, little in great ones—and a human sledge-hammer. When hard hitting is required, Primus

can strike home, as he did at Cremona. Such men are useful—but we want more than this in a Caesar. How rarely is the head that can plan furnished with the hand that can execute! There are men who can take, but cannot hold; men who can hold, but cannot take. And to be able to hold is, I think, a far rarer thing than to be able to take. Galba, Otho, Vitellius —all seized what they could not hold. You, Lucius, are one of the few men who are equal to all fortunes. The opinions of men do not move you—you never lose yourself, as I see other men do, in the wills of those around them, or even in your own fancies. He that would rule, must be able to stand aloof."

"I did not know, Publius, that you had reflected so much on the qualities of a ruler," said Piso. "I thought pleasure, not power, had been the subject of your contemplations."

"Power being pleasure," said Crassus—"new pleasure. Man is happier than the beasts only because he can enjoy power. Power is the spice of pleasure—the only thing which can save us from satiety. Power is all things in one—reflect upon it, Lucius, and you will see that all conscious pleasures can be resolved into the exercise of power, and the limit of power is the limit of pleasure. The perception of this made men invent the Gods. *We* are the Gods, Lucius!"

"Yet subject to those ungodlike calamities—disease and death, Publius."

"Alas! yes. Could we find a remedy for *them*, we were Gods indeed. Yet seventy years of pleasure, Lucius—and so much many a vigorous man has enjoyed—are not to be despised. And empire, Lucius—think what it means! The empire of the habitable world! You are scarce forty, and a man of unsurpassed vigour of body. You might reign for thirty years! The sickly Augustus reigned for forty-one. *You* could be greater than Augustus, Lucius. He was no general, and narrowly escaped ruin whenever he ventured to conduct any military affair. If Antony had not offended the Romans by his infatuation for Cleopatra, his superior military genius would have given *him* the victory. But he wanted prudence—and he flung away all he had won for a swarthy Egyptian woman. *You* have the prudence of Augustus joined to Antony's skill in war—all Rome believes you are a greater general than that purple-faced butcher snoring there. They love you for Agricola's sake. Be our Caesar, Lucius, and lead us against the Dacians! I myself will lay aside the toga, and follow you to redeem the Roman honour!"

So Crassus argued on—now appealing to Piso's fears, now to his hopes, and, above all, to the soldier's thirst for glory—always coming round to this, that

Piso's wisest, indeed, only course, was to give him Calpurnia without delay, and by thus assuring him of his friendship, enable him to cast in his lot with him. "There is no time to lose," he said, over and over again. "I must know what to trust to."

"I have told you, I shall take no action whatever," said Piso.

"You will not escape so—you are already compromised," said Crassus, whose interest it was to magnify the danger. "You are compromised by your communication with Demetrius and Apollonius—— "

"I have had none," interrupted Piso.

"Who will believe you?" said Crassus. "You are friendly with Demetrius—— "

"I never sought him. It was he that thrust himself on me."

"Who will believe you?" asked Crassus again. "Demetrius is the agent and spy of Apollonius, and *you* have been seen speaking privately with Demetrius —by night. Oh, all is known, Lucius! And now I will tell you another thing, which, were you on your trial, would tell against you"—Crassus was always thus forecasting Piso's being put upon his trial— "Did you hear the 'portent,' as they call it—why do you start?"

Piso had changed colour a little—he thought Crassus referred to the doors at Baiae. "I attach

little weight to portents," he said. "If not a trick, it was an accident—the wind was high——"

"Can the wind counterfeit a human voice?" asked Crassus, snappishly. "Eighty thousand people heard the words——"

"I had misunderstood you," said Piso. "I perceive you refer to the voice we heard at the Shows —of course, some friend of the Christians——"

"What did you think I meant?" said Crassus, looking at him sharply.

"Nothing of the least consequence," replied Piso, and Crassus knew it would be useless to inquire further. "But what have those words—which, as you truly say, eighty thousand persons heard—to do with me?"

"They can be made to wear an ugly significance when it is known that Aulus is a Christian, and that you refuse me your daughter, to give her to him," whispered Crassus—his voice sounded to Piso like the almost inaudible hissing of a serpent. "But that is not all. There are those who think that the words —though apparently addressed to the criminal about to suffer, were in reality intended for other ears—were, in fact, a signal, which for some reason or other was not obeyed——"

"A signal for what?" asked Piso.

"You affect not to understand me, Lucius. A

signal to the conspirators to strike, of course. Regulus suggested this to Domitian yesterday, and Domitian instantly fastened on the idea. He knows how many enemies he has in the Senate. Believe me, Lucius, you are compromised, and were you brought to the trial you sometimes talk of demanding, I would not give a sestertius for your chances."

Had Crassus known when to stop, or had he been more able to judge of the impression he produced on other men, he might have made Piso waver. He had appealed to Piso's weakest point. To redeem the disgrace of the Roman arms, to lead his countrymen to victory—this was a bait which needed all his distrust of Crassus to enable him to see that it was indeed only a bait, held out to lure him on to his destruction. The grossness of the flattery disgusted him; but Domitian's generals had displayed such signal incompetence, that Piso might without vanity hope for better fortune.

"Rome is an unwholesome place for me, Aemilia," said Piso to his wife that night. Aemilia turned pale. "Nay," he said, smiling, "I do not mean what you imagine. But I fear, Aemilia, if I am long in Rome, I shall grow ambitious. I must work hard at my *History*—do not speak of it to any one, Aemilia—and teach myself, out of the story of the past, how vain

a thing is fame, how soon the greatest names fade into forgetfulness."

So Piso tried to silence the voice which was always whispering in his ear, that Empire was within his grasp.

CHAPTER IX.

A SACRILEGIOUS VOW.

Long after Piso and the more sober of the guests had retired, Crassus continued to drink with Antonius and Parthenius, until the banquet degenerated into an orgie. It was against Crassus's custom to drink deep, nor did he like disorderly revelling, but whether because that view of Palatinus had proved an intoxication more potent than wine, or whether to make sure of drowning any inconvenient recollections which these two dangerous guests might have carried away with them—Crassus fancied Parthenius had looked at him too hard—Crassus on this occasion departed from his rule. He not only drank deep, but he sent for his slave-girls, and even recalled Chione, who had left the banqueting-room when Piso took his leave. Crassus, in fact, drank far more than he intended, and with all his care in selecting his wines—pressing the more heady Falernian on Parthenius and Antonius, and reserving the lighter Setine and Chian for him-

self—he found his head swimming, and a buzzing in his ears; and when he awoke in the morning he could not remember how or when the servants of Parthenius and Antonius had carried their masters to their litters. All he could remember was seeing Parthenius lie snoring on the floor, grasping a cushion which he had dragged with him when he fell from the couch, and the purple face of Antonius, with mouth wide open, staring at him as he lay half sitting, half lying on the floor, his head propped against the base of a pillar.

Crassus remembered all this distinctly, and the pools of wine on the floor, and the broken cups; but he had a less clear remembrance of something else which he would have been glad to recall exactly. What had he said to Chione, whom he could hear whispering in his ear, but could not see? And what had he said or done about the Statue of Venus? He dimly recollected some one addressing her in a poetic rhapsody, putting a ring on her finger, imploring her pardon for inconstancy, and vowing that no other should be his bride. He would have concluded all this to be only the dim recollection of a drunken dream, if he had not missed his ring—that ring which he always called the "key of the dungeon," because there were a few grains of white powder hidden cunningly within it which would set the torturer at

defiance. The ring was gone, and Crassus felt that in its loss a bad omen—the very worst of omens—had befallen him. He believed in neither Gods nor men; but it struck a cold chill to his ribs to find himself without this ring. He had always looked on it as a sort of talisman. It was a fine cameo, engraved with Circe offering her enchanted cup to Ulysses. At the back of the gem was a tiny box, and in the box a pinch of dust with a death in every grain.

It also seemed to Crassus that he had last night promised Chione her freedom; but his utmost efforts failed to discover whether she knew anything of the disappearance of the ring. When he told her of it, she said scornfully, "Send and search my chamber," and had insisted on this being done. But she might have conveyed the ring out of the house in a dozen ways, long before Crassus awoke, oppressed by a racking headache and a deadly sickness, and began to fumble in the corners of his memory. It was on the hand of Venus that he placed the ring—of that he was sure. He fancied that the hand had closed upon it; but this, of course, was only a drunken fancy, aided by a reminiscence of some old story. Probably Chione had it. He went round to all the pawnbrokers during the next few days; it seemed to him that his destiny turned on his recovery of this ring. But he could hear nothing of a small oval

cameo, singularly fine in colour, and admirably engraved with figures of Circe and Ulysses. The pawnbrokers, one and all, lifted up their hands, and swore they had never seen it; and even Crassus's offer of ten thousand sestertii, and no questions asked, failed to produce it.

CHAPTER X.

GOOD SOCIETY.

A DAY now seldom passed in which Crassus did not come or send some reminder of himself. Now it was a basket of asparagus from Ravenna, which he hoped might tempt Calpurnia's appetite, now some early Persian apricots, or a dish of mushrooms. Next, he sent a white gazelle, with a silver collar, and "To Calpurnia" engraved upon it. To Piso he gave an exquisite little drinking-cup, the handle formed by a Victory, which he had brought from Greece. Next day he sent a box of precious unguent to Aemilia. He presented Cornelia with a clever little negro boy. All these gifts came under the pretext of inquiries after Calpurnia's health. "As I am very desirous of learning how our dear Calpurnia is going on, I take the opportunity, my dear cousin, of sending a trifle by the messenger, which may possibly, etc." These notes, written on the finest *Claudia*, and tied up with a silken thread, came almost every morning; and

Crassus would sometimes make inquiries in person on the same day. He never saw Calpurnia—for which the doctor's orders were pleaded—and Cornelia was barely civil to him, but Crassus never resented this. "Your mother does not like me, Lucius," he would say sometimes. "I entirely forgive her. Circumstances have unhappily forced me into the invidious position of your rival. I only lament and wonder that so sensible a woman does not see that the alliance I so much desire would render my rivalry harmless. I went so far as to say as much to her yesterday—you know it is my rule to be frank—but she only gave me a stony stare, and replied that, in Calpurnia's present delicate state of health, all such ideas must be postponed."

Crassus could make no impression on Cornelia; but he succeeded in forcing Piso and Aemilia into society which was very repugnant to them. He brought Regulus, Veiento, and old Catullus Messalinus to visit them, and going into affected raptures at the excellence of Piso's cook—whose skill he had, he said, proved at Baiae—he left Piso no choice but to invite them all to dinner.

"We accept—on condition that our sweet Aemilia will grace the occasion with her presence, Lucius," said Crassus, whose entire lack of moral perception often led him to say things which were in bad taste.

"And, what do you say, Aemilia, to inviting the lively Fulvia and her dutiful Cotilus—just to make up the number of the Muses, you know?"

Aemilia, with a heightened colour at Crassus's presumption in not only forcing a guest upon her, but one who was, as he must have known, a very unwelcome one, looked at her husband, and said, "Perhaps, Lucius, you prefer a smaller party?"

"By no means," replied Piso, who did not know how insolent Fulvia was to Aemilia, and, though he disliked the woman, thought her presence might serve to divert the attention of his unwelcome guests from himself. But, in irony or forgetfulness, he said—

"Pray invite Fulvia, if you desire it, Aemilia, but you cannot leave out her husband Balbus—we must invite him too."

Crassus laughed. "My dearest cousin," he said, "your simplicity is sublime! Have you been living at Baiae, and don't know that Fulvia has not been on speaking terms with Balbus this year and more, and is only waiting to divorce him when Cotilus's law-suit is decided? If Cotilus gets his case, she will marry him."

"Since things have gone so far, Aemilia, I prefer not to invite Fulvia," said Piso, coldly. "A wife who divorces her husband is not a desirable acquaintance for modest women."

"I told you, Veiento, that my cousin was a little archaic in his notions," said Crassus.

Something in his smile so nettled Aemilia, that she said sharply—

"Not so archaic, cousin, is he? I thought that Domitian himself had made an Edict——"

"My sweetest Aemilia, that was only one of his jokes," said Crassus, laughing. "The best of them all! By the way, Veiento, is it not rich to see the solemn irony with which our little Martial compliments His Divinity on that Edict? But, seriously, Lucius, such sentiments as yours have been out of fashion since the Siege of Troy—the sentiments of Deucalion and Pyrrha. Positively, Lucius, you must pardon my laughing at you in your new character of husbands' champion. Veiento here will tell you that most husbands are only too grateful to their wives for kindly sparing them the expense of the suit, by instituting it themselves. We are not all Arcadians."

"The art of living, my dear fellow," said Veiento, with insolence which he took no pains to disguise, "was not understood by the ancients."

"No, indeed," said old Catullus, softly rubbing his withered hands together. "The heroic ages can have had very little to recommend them."

This infamous old man was the object of Piso's peculiar abhorrence. Of low birth, he had attained,

by a long course of flattery and deceit, to senatorial rank, and had been Governor of the Libyan Pentapolis, where he had distinguished himself by his oppression. He had long been blind; but this affliction had only rendered the natural cruelty of his disposition more malignant. He was one of the most notorious of the informers who amassed wealth by working on Domitian's fears.

Before they went into the supper-room, Piso had a very disagreeable proof of the manner in which Crassus must have spoken of Calpurnia. Old Catullus, leaning on Veiento's arm, his shrunken figure bedizened in a green robe, which made his shrivelled and wrinkled countenance look perfectly ghastly, came up to Aemilia, and, fumbling for her hand, began, while his little dim eyes, almost lost in his head, blinked violently—

"You will excuse an old man, my pretty young lady, who has heard so much of your beauty—a lovely hand, to be sure, and what an arm! Lovely Calpurnia——"

"You mistake me for my daughter, Sir," said Aemilia, very coldly, extricating her hand and arm from his clutch.

"Oh! pray excuse me," said Catullus, drawing back as if he had been bitten. Aemilia heard him whisper to Veiento, "The Infernal Gods take you,

Fabricius! Why did you not tell me the girl was not here?"

This incident, slight as it was, and notorious as was Catullus's character for licentiousness, made a deadly impression upon Piso. He seemed to see in it a whole revelation of his kinsman's true character reflected in this his infamous companion. And with this man he was compelled to keep terms, to observe the outward forms of civility, and even to give him evasive answers when he asked him for his daughter! Piso, on his part, although perfectly well-bred and courteous, yet offended all his self-invited guests by the stately reserve of his bearing.

"I confess I don't see your motive in all this court you pay to Lucius Piso," said Veiento, when he met Crassus at the Baths next day. "A haughty Stoic and aristocrat; you will get nothing out of him, and if you imagine he will ever be made Emperor"—this was in a cautious whisper—"you are grievously mistaken. We are not such fools, I hope, as to put power in the hands of a man like *him*. No, indeed; that would be to prepare a rod for our own backs, with a vengeance!"

CHAPTER XI.

STOIC AND EPICUREAN.

Arulenus and Gratilla, coming to visit Piso one morning, found a litter standing in the vestibule. It was very large, of the kind called hexaphorum, because six bearers were required for it; it was furnished with handsome curtains, and rested on ivory feet. A crowd of shabby and unkempt young men in ragged togas stood round it; they were talking very loud, and scarcely gave way when the visitors tried to make for the door.

"Who is this, who has so many clients?" asked Arulenus of the porter.

"It is the great doctor Symmachus," said the porter—he was a negro, and, as he spoke, he grinned and showed all his white teeth. "He has come to see our young lady, who does not throw off her fever. Madam Cornelia sent for him; but my master would not allow his pupils to enter, and they are angry."

When Dr. Symmachus—a very important person,

who affected great gravity and sententiousness, and would speak only Greek—had sufficiently felt Calpurnia's pulse, and shaken his head over her, he bid her avoid fatigues and chills and eat only the flesh of deer. He further promised to send her a decoction of river-crabs in wine, boiled down to one-fourth. "Some," said he, "would have her swallow the left eye of the same animal; but this I regard as folly. Keep her warm, and let her eat deer's flesh. She has taken a chill, which has struck upon the blood. I'll call again to-morrow."

Cornelia, who could have told more about the origin of Calpurnia's illness than Dr. Symmachus had been able to discover, was very uneasy, and begged Gratilla to come and see her. Piso was left with Arulenus.

"I am sorry, Lucius, that Calpurnia is ill," said Arulenus; "and yet, if it is merely a slight attack of fever—not uncommon in the spring of the year, you know—it may not be an unfortunate thing for you."

"What do you mean?" asked Piso, astonished.

"Why—do not alarm yourself overmuch—you will need your utmost coolness—yes, and craftiness, too, if you have any—your cousin is determined upon marrying her. I heard to-day he had allowed it to be supposed that you were about to consent."

"Never! I never will! I swear it by the Immortal Gods!" cried Piso, furious.

"Be calm, I beseech you," said Arulenus; "or, if you will, expend your rage at once, and afterwards be calm. It was Regulus told me the other night, and I should have come to you yesterday, but feared it might be remarked."

"It shall never be!" cried Piso. "Rather shall Aulus have her——"

"You may be driven to plead a prior contract," said Arulenus. "But fortune has supplied you with an admirable excuse in Calpurnia's illness. You must gain time; you must give Symmachus a hint to speak of her condition as serious; let him say he fears she may fall into a decline, and that he won't answer for her life if she marries under a year at least. I would tell the child the truth—if she does not know it already. Let her see her Marcella, and tell her she feels herself very ill. Marcella will tell her mother; her mother will tell somebody else; somebody else will tell Fulvia; and Fulvia will tell all Rome. So Crassus will hear it, and, whatever he may suspect, can say nothing. Of course you must make it worth Symmachus's while; but that will be easy—the longer the sickness, the larger the fee."

"Such crooked ways revolt me!" said Piso. "Am I not her father? Can I not refuse her to whom I will?"

"It may be as much as your life is worth to refuse

her to Crassus at the present moment," said Arulenus, in a cautious voice. "Whether there be an actual plot or no—and I believe there is one—the tyrant's suspicions are roused afresh. Remember the executions after Saturninus's revolt. He has been worse ever since; he was always bloodthirsty, but since then he has laid aside all pretence. I am in daily expectation of hearing of arrests, if of nothing worse. I would not give a sestertius for Nerva's life. He has been spared because his removal would merely clear the way for other pretenders more formidable—and I think, Lucius, one of those more formidable pretenders is not very far off at this present moment."

"I will not affect to misunderstand you, Arulenus," said Piso, uneasily. "Hints have been dropped—by my cousin, and by others—which appear to mean that if I would put myself forward, I should find a party ready to support me. But my vanity does not so far blind me as to leave me ignorant that this may be a subtle device to get me to compromise myself."

"I have already warned you, Lucius," said Arulenus, "that Crassus casts a longing eye on your great wealth. After your own children, he is your heir. If your property were confiscated, he might easily prevail upon Domitian to share the spoils with him in return for his having entrapped and denounced you. How gladly would Domitian see Agricola's

favourite Tribune, the sharer—in some sense, the inheritor—of Agricola's renown, found guilty of *majestas!* Your connection with Agricola, your military fame, your wealth—here are three terrible reasons, Lucius, which render you obnoxious to Domitian, and his simulated good will only increases my fears for you. I have often told you that Domitian caresses before he strikes."

"In what stead does your philosophy stand you now, Arulenus?" said Piso, after a gloomy pause.

"It teaches me to expect ill fortune with an equal mind," answered Arulenus, "and not to suffer by anticipation as well as in reality. It teaches me that so long as I refuse to call a thing a misfortune, it is to me no misfortune, the only true misfortunes being the commission of injustice or the losing one's equanimity."

"Is it true that these are the only misfortunes, Rusticus?" said Piso. "These, I grant you, are the only things which, in a wise man's eyes, can injure the true dignity of man. But is a man's dignity his only vulnerable part? So long as he can wrap himself in his mantle of self-approval, is he to be indifferent to all else? Is the loss of friends no misfortune? Is it no evil to a man to be deprived of the senses whereby he is able to act and be acted upon? Is it no evil to be hindered of that freedom

of motion whereby a man differs from an insensate stone? To cease to be a free agent—— "

"No one is a free agent," said Rusticus, interrupting him. "Free-will is a dream of man's blind pride. We are like flies in a glass bottle; we think we are in the free air, and we beat our wings to pieces against the invisible wall which surrounds us. And how do we know what is or is not a misfortune? That loss of friends which we deplore may have been—did we but know it—a piece of good fortune. Perhaps, had they lived longer, they might have fallen into great calamity; perhaps they might have grown cold or false. We know, or think we know, what is; but who can tell what shall be?"

"Such a doctrine paralyses human action, Arulenus. Men would cease to till the ground or gather in the harvest, and the race would perish in a single revolution of the sun."

"And if it did, what matters?" said Rusticus. "How poor a thing is human life! How pitiful and degrading its pleasures! What wise man can desire a continuance of such an existence? To be delivered from the bondage of the body—this troublesome body which is always clamouring for all sorts of things in which the soul has no delight, so that the philosopher must leave the contemplation of truth itself to fill his belly with a little pulse—— "

"There you are again, Rusticus!" cried Piso. "You Stoics come back ever to this, that death is better than life. Your philosophy revolts my common sense. It is as though a man should say that nothing is better than something."

"Nay, Lucius; you are always unjust to us," said Arulenus. "We say the soul is so much better a thing than the body, that it is a misfortune to the soul to be tied to so vile a companion, and, with Plato, thank the Gods that this body is not immortal."

"After all," said Piso, "you and the Epicureans say the very self-same things of life and death, and of the temper of a wise man's thoughts; the only difference between you is, that the Epicureans say that it is foolish to suffer pain, but you, that it is foolish to seek pleasure. They would make the best of the body; you despise everything but the soul."

"The soul is the man himself!" cried Rusticus, with kindling eyes. "What is my body? A lump of flesh and blood, soon to be a little handful of grey ashes. Something rather nearer to me than the walls of my house, but no more a part of *me* than those walls. Depend upon it, Lucius, he makes the best of his body who despises it most, and allows it to disturb him least."

"It is the old story," said Piso. "The Epicureans bid us aim too low, like a preceptor who sets his

scholars a task too easy for them; but the Stoics would make of us not men, but stocks and stones. The winds may howl, the rains may beat, but to the wise man this is all one, as though the west wind were blowing and the sun shining. My common sense, my very honesty, revolts—— "

"They have pressed it too far," said Rusticus. "Of course, as long as a man has a skin, he must know whether it is wet or dry. But, as in a battle men often do not know that they are wounded, so may the philosopher be lifted above common pleasures and pains. As when one is intently reading one does not hear the noises in the street, so the wise man will not hear the idle noises of the world."

"But there are noises which are not idle—noises which he ought to hear," said Piso. "Surely, Rusticus, the chief part of a wise man's business is to find out what he ought to do, and, having found it, to do it?"

"It is the Epicureans, not we, Lucius, who bid a philosopher to abstain from public affairs."

"I know it," said Piso; "but your doctrine is likely to have the same effect. A man cannot walk through the Forum as though he were a statue. Your Stoics talk as though the wise man's life were one continued triumphal procession—there he goes in his chariot, with all his vices and follies in chains before him!

But, alas! Rusticus, the wise man knows that these enemies are not yet conquered; he knows that he is often almost worsted, and has much ado to keep his feet. I am tempted to quote Flaccus to you—

> "'Ad summum, sapiens uno minor est Jove—dives,
> Liber, honoratus, pulcher, rex denique regum;
> Praecipue sanus—*nisi cum pituita molesta est.*'

And, indeed, you Stoics often talk as though a philosopher should be above having a cold in his head."

"He will have it; but he will not suffer it to disturb his equanimity," said Rusticus. "All men fall short of the standard they set up for themselves; one must therefore make the standard as high as possible."

"And you think complete indifference to all that is going on around us is wisdom?" said Piso. "Then the common herd should be our model. What care they for anything so long as their bellies are full of corn?"

"You are unfair, Lucius, and you forget that he who is perturbed and agitated is not likely to act as wisely as he who is calm, and master of himself. You confound the careless indifference of the common herd with the philosophic superiority of the wise man. That sublime self-possession of the philosopher is a very different thing."

"Have you attained to it, Rusticus?"

"Alas, no, Lucius! I cannot reach that *un*passion-

ateness, that *Apathia*, which is, I confess, alone worthy of a philosopher. When I see injustice and oppression, I feel a most unphilosophic anger, and I remind myself in vain that injustice hurts the unjust person more than his victim."

"Then how can *I* be calm?" said Piso, "when I see my country and this sacred City lying at the mercy of her own soldiers; all justice set at naught; no man able to speak freely; and even my rights as a father set aside, so that you tell me that if I refuse my daughter to a profligate sycophant, I do it at peril of my life? Am I to maintain a tranquil mind, and say that this is perhaps a piece of good fortune? Not so, Rusticus, did our fathers build up the Republic!"

CHAPTER XII.

MASKS IN THE TUSCAN STREET.

There was always something going on in Rome. The day before the Ides of April the games of Ceres were celebrated in the Great Circus with a procession through the Forum and horse and chariot races. Calpurnia thought it very hard that she was not allowed to go; but Dr. Symmachus, on a hint from Aemilia, threw himself into such a fume at the idea, declaring that Shows were expressly contrived to kill off patients suffering from quartan fevers, that Calpurnia was silenced. Marcella, however, who visited her sick friend with faithful regularity, and came to describe the Games, was very indignant, declaring that only last year Symmachus had told her mother, who had had a touch of fever, that if she took care not to get a chill, the Games would not do her the least harm. Calpurnia on this, pleaded so hard to go to the Circus on the last day of the Cerealia, that Aemilia yielded, and Calpurnia for once saw a Show

at which nothing was killed—except the foxes, who, according to ancient custom, were let loose in the Circus with firebrands tied to their tails.

The clients were now in full swing. So continually did they invade Piso's privacy, that at last he fixed certain hours during which alone he was to be seen —thus giving great offence to the parasites, and the parasites' parasites, who industriously spread it abroad that Lucius Piso was proud, and despised The People. It was also commented on that he went but once to the Circus during the Cerealia; but the report which did him most harm was one which represented him as having said nothing should induce him to give a Spectacle. Piso was enormously rich—why did he not follow Stella's example, and give the poor Romans a little diversion in honour of the victories over Decebalus?

Meanwhile the Palilia were at hand. As every one knew, this festival of Pales, the Shepherd God, was also the Birthday of Rome, and Calpurnia would not hear of not taking part in *these* solemnities. Either the deer's flesh, or Dr. Symmachus's other remedies, had subdued the malady, and she was a great deal better — so much better, indeed, that her parents feared they would not be able to keep up this convenient pretence of sickness. So she and Aemilia and Cornelia unplaited their hair, put on white

robes, and went down into the Forum, where, under Germalus, stood Vesta's temple.

The altar in front of the temple was dressed, and here the ashes of the calves lately sacrificed to Ceres and the blood of the October Horse were mixed with bean-shells, and set on fire by a torch kindled at Vesta's fire. The multitude—of all ranks and conditions—pressed forward to breathe the sacred smoke, and touch the altar with boughs of rosemary and laurel, and when the consecration began, shepherds drove their sheep past the altar, and offered cakes and milk to Pales.

As Calpurnia, with her mother and grandmother, approached the altar—their servants making way for them with objurgations to the crowd to let the noble ladies pass, and wait till their betters had done their devotions, assisting these exhortations with a little gentle persuasion of shoulders and elbows—she heard an unpleasantly familiar voice exclaim, "Permit me, my dear cousins. Good people, pray give way a little. Do you not see that the young lady is ill?"

Calpurnia, who had felt a little faint from being hemmed in by a crowd in which the odours of garlic and the perfumes of Cosmus combined to form a mixture of smells intolerable to the human nose, blushed scarlet on seeing Crassus. He, however, appeared perfectly at his ease. He politely and with

compliments, put the crowd aside, and made way to the smoking altar, behind which, among the other Vestals, Calpurnia saw Junia, Fannia's cousin, and then quickly got them out of the crowd, and sent one of their servants to fetch their litters.

"I think it proper to pay my respects to Pales on the Birthday of Rome," he observed, while they were waiting. "But I think our Lucius—by the way, is he not here?—would agree that this pastoral celebration, with its sacrifices of milk and cakes, is a little out of date. The Shepherd City of old Evander has, I think, outgrown the primaeval sheepfold"—he pointed as he spoke to the Capitol and the Forum—"Evander certainly would not know it; and Pales—a respectable rustic deity, no doubt—is rather a milk-and-water God for the Mistress of the World. I never heard of his wielding any weapon more deadly than a vine-stock."

"I am sorry, Publius, to hear you jest at these most ancient rites," said Cornelia. "Our forefathers became great by duly observing them."

"My dear cousin," returned Crassus, lightly, "our forefathers—clever fellows that they were—became great by taking care to have sharper swords than their neighbours, and learning how to use them better. They observed these antiquated rites because they had never considered the matter, and knew no

better. But in spite of an occasional triumph, and lots of fighting, their lives must have been uncommonly dull—no baths, no porticos, no sleeves to their tunics, bad wine and precious little of it, houses you couldn't swing a cat in, food that our slaves would turn up their noses at. You must admit, Cornelia, that whatever they may have known, they did *not* know how to live. Here are the litters."

Cornelia did not deign an answer.

As Calpurnia was in the act of drawing up her feet into the litter, she saw Theophila standing a little way off, her eyes fixed upon her. Involuntarily, Calpurnia glanced at Crassus. But in that very instant Theophila had vanished in the crowd which surged up round the altar, and Calpurnia saw her no more.

Piso gave the Romans another proof of his pride and austerity, in shutting himself up during the five days of the Floralia. He had seen the unmeasured licence of this festival in his youth, and remembered with disgust the shameless scenes in which even respectable matrons mingled. Julius, however, moved by a boy's curiosity, stole out unperceived on the evening of the last and wildest day of these summer Saturnalia, and, before he was aware, got into an uproarious crowd of men and women, bearing torches and shouting unclean verses in the same feigned tones

which one may hear now on a Martedì Grasso. It was an exquisitely mild summer night, as mild as though the cruel *tramontana* never blew, and with, as yet, no noisome vapours to taint the kindly air. Julius was crossing the Ox-market when he got into this crowd, and had just halted to admire the round Temple of Mother Matuta, which stood in the middle of the market, and had been dressed for the occasion in strings of coloured lamps, which defined all its outlines, and made it appear to be built of stars.

"Here he is!" squeaked the leader of the rabble—the only one who seemed to be perfectly sober. "Come along, dear boy! We have waited for you."

Julius found himself hemmed in and hustled along, with a good deal of horseplay, in the direction of the Tuscan Street. Here the shops had been closed, except the wine-shops, which were doing a roaring trade—the effects of which were to be seen in the revellers. Long lines of booths, set out with fruit and cakes, had been erected, and left a somewhat narrow passage, delaying the roysterers, who stopped to exchange compliments with the booth-keepers. The light of the lamps in these booths fell on the gay, many-coloured robes of the worshippers of Flora, on the long false hair of their masks, and on the garlands of linden bark and green leaves and roses which almost covered them. The smoke of the

torches rose like a lurid fog, and filled the street. Julius's persecutors stopped close by the statue of Vertumnus. The statue was entirely draped in roses, but, although the riotous celebrators of the Floralia had respected them, they hung now faded and withered.

"Here is a fresh wreath for you, Vertumnus!" cried a very tall young man, in an enormous mask, flinging a festoon of roses so skilfully that it alighted on the neck of the statue. There was a light in the upper window of a house opposite, and a woman was leaning out, who cried shrilly—

"Well aimed, little Titus!"

The tall young man uttered a whoop, and called up, "Are you there, Lesbia?"

But he was evidently more intent upon Julius, upon whose arm he had kept a firm grip, except when he had released him for an instant to fling the garland to Vertumnus. It was a very common jest in times of Saturnalia for parties of revellers to seize upon passers-by, and compel them to join their company, and Julius had no suspicion that he was the subject of anything more than a jest. It would have been impossible to stem the current of the crowd, which was flowing away from the Ox-market, so Julius resigned himself to accompanying his captors, until he could escape down some side-street. Meanwhile,

those more immediately around him were crowding into the booth nearest to the statue, which happened to be devoted to the sale of cakes made in the image of Flora.

"Hand us a Flora, old one," said the tall young man, stretching out one hand, with a small coin in it. Then, still clutching Julius, he proceeded to eat the cake, thrusting it far into the depths of his mask, and between each mouthful offering a bite to Julius, who thought it prudent to enter into the joke, and swallow at once his own prejudices and Flora's shoulder.

"Give me a bit, Titus," said one of the female members of the party, whose mature charms were so liberally displayed that Julius wondered she had thought it necessary to conceal her face behind a small black mask. This person much annoyed Julius by kissing him with lips which did not breathe roses.

The street was growing fuller every moment, and the new-comers complained of the others for not moving on.

"A moment, a moment, gentlemen!" cried Titus. "Important business detains me." Then, addressing the stall-keeper, he said, with burlesque politeness, "Ancient servant of the lover of Pomona, permit this young gentleman and me to enter your booth for a

moment—we are ingenuously born-citizens of Rome—we will not steal your Floras."

Several officious hands of both men and women enforced compliance on the hesitating cake-seller, who was gently hustled out of his booth, and kept at some distance from it, while Titus pushed Julius inside, and standing so as nearly to conceal him, exclaimed aloud, "Heavens! he has no mask!" and lifting up the huge helmet-shaped mask of Flora which he wore, he clapped it on Julius, leaving his own countenance disguised only by a small black mask, like that worn by the woman.

"You have not yet your father's shoulders," whispered Titus, who without his mask was of very moderate stature. "And now that I can say a word to you, and no one be any the wiser, come along."

And waving their torches, and raising the Hymn of Flora, the whole disorderly rout set off down the Tuscan street, in the direction of the Forum, dancing as they went—the woman flinging her arm round Julius's neck, and prancing along beside him.

"Tell your father the Praetorians must have money, if they are to move in the business," said Titus, speaking into the mask he had put upon Julius.

"What business?"

"*The* business—no business at all," replied Titus, gripping Julius's arm. "Are you silly? or is your

father wise enough to keep his own counsel? Tell him you heard a man in the crowd talking about the Praetorians, and saying how shamefully Galba deceived them. Tell him the people care not who gives them free corn and shows them chariot-races—a Flavius or a Calpurnius—it's all one. The soldiers want pay—at least these palace-soldiers do—and while they get it, they won't ask very closely whether Fuscus beat Decebalus, or Decebalus beat Fuscus. What does it matter to us whether we beat the Dacians or no? They are a long way off. They have beaten Fuscus—what then? We can spare him. We should never have known he was killed, if they had not told us—— "

"Are you Publius Crassus that speak?" said Julius, interrupting.

"No; I am Titus. Did not you hear the courtesan call me so?" said the other, in the same hoarse whisper in which he had uttered all his private communications. "But I know where the wind blows from as well as he you have named. Tell your father to give us some Shows. The way to Rome's heart is through her eyes and her stomach—'bread and Shows' are what she wants. If your father gave us a Spectacle, his name would be in every one's mouth."

They were turning the corner of a short dark street, which led into the Field of Mars. Titus suddenly

relieved Julius of the mask and slipped it over his own head. "Go, brother," he said aloud, in his mummer's falsetto, "go—rejoin your own company. You are still too green, brother, for our choice spirits to admit you to their number."

"Oh!" groaned some of the women, as Julius tried to slip away. "Don't leave us, pretty boy! Make a night of it. We're so fond of you!"

Julius had some difficulty in escaping from these affectionate invitations. Luckily for his morals, the more than doubtful persons who gave them, and who made the Floralia their peculiar festival, were so much the reverse of charming, that Julius felt no inclination to continue in their company.

After wandering about for some time in the network of narrow—and now perfectly dark—streets which lay between the Palatine and the Campus Martius, often hearing the roar of the multitude, and seeing torches flash past the end of the street, when he approached the wider thoroughfares, Julius at last succeeded in striking on the Via Lata, just where the New Arch spanned it. When Julius entered it, the street was comparatively empty, though parties of masqueraders were to be seen rolling about in various stages of intoxication, while every now and then Julius almost fell over the body of a reveller who had succumbed altogether.

Julius was still but a boy, and he knew that his father would be much displeased that he should have been even a spectator of the revolting scenes enacting in the streets. He had passed the Arch of Claudius and was in the Via Lata, when—the street curving round to the left—he began to ascend the eastern spur of the Capitol. He had almost reached the Gate, and was just passing between the sepulchres. A feeble lamp was burning in front of the tomb of the Aedile Bibulus—placed there by the piety or the superstitious fears of some neighbouring shopkeeper. By its light Julius could dimly discern the smoke-blackened pilasters of the upper story and the first letters of the inscription on the pedestal. Suddenly, he heard a voice, which seemed to be close at his ear, utter his name in a loud whisper. He started, and looked behind him; but there was no one, and a cold sweat broke out on his brow as he remembered how larvae sometimes haunted tombs. Before, however, he could flee, he heard the voice again.

"Stop, Julius Calpurnius!" it said, and then he saw something rise out of the deep shadow at the side of the Aedile's tomb—something which he could just make out was a woman.

"I have a message for your grandmother Cornelia," she whispered, coming close to him, and laying a

warm and undoubtedly living hand on Julius's arm. "For you, too. I saw you with him they call Titus —trust not to his words. He bade you tell your father to exhibit games—he knows that Domitian is jealous of those who make themselves popular. Tell Cornelia this, and tell her there is danger in the air. Ascletario says so."

As footsteps were heard approaching from the gate, the woman vanished in the opposite direction, and Julius, yielding to a sudden instinct to conceal himself, retired into the shadow of the tomb, and lay down, his face to the ground, hoping if he was perceived at all, to pass for a drunken man overcome with sleep.

Between the folds of his cloak, he could see the glare of torches, and presently a crowd of persons rushed by, shouting, yelling, and dancing in a most unproarious manner. They were gone in a moment —clattering down the steep street with shrieks of laughter—but Julius had recognized them as the same company of roysterers who had forced him to join them. He saw the women, now without their masks, and some of them nearly naked—but he could not be sure that Crassus was still with them. All the men wore the same colossal masks of Flora—the regular impassive features contrasting almost shockingly with the riotous movements and the hideous

noise as they flashed by in the smoky glare of the torchlight.

It seemed to Julius that scales had fallen from his eyes, and that he saw a plot to destroy his father. He was sure that the man they called Titus was Calpurnius Crassus, and, boy as Julius was, he knew that Crassus would not have taken part in this vulgar orgie without some serious motive. Crassus did not like the garlic-eating multitude well enough to share in its dissipations. And yet what object could Crassus have in thus mingling disguised in the mob? Julius had imparted to no one but the slave who was to let him in his intention of seeing the Floralia—Crassus could not therefore have come to give him that message. The matter was too perplexing for Julius. Only one thing was clear to him—he resolved that he need say nothing to his father, unless his absence should have been discovered But it was not. Julius slipped in at the postern-door, where his servant was waiting for him, and stealing unperceived to his chamber, soon forgot his perplexities in a sound sleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ARREST OF THE SENATORS.

All this while, only one letter had been received from Eudoxus. It had come by the roundabout route of the Egnatian Way, and had been delayed by floods. It had been written very soon after Eudoxus's arrival, and gave an account of his voyage and of the health of Caius and Aulus—but so cautiously worded, that it told the anxious parents next to nothing of what they most wished to know. Piso had replied very briefly, desiring Eudoxus to remain at Athens until he could return by sea—thus avoiding the perils and hardships of travelling through Macedonia in the winter. But now that Crassus had begun to press his suit, Piso determined to send for Aulus, letting Eudoxus remain to watch over Caius. A letter was written to this effect, carefully sealed with the emerald-signet, and despatched by a trusty messenger.

It was about noon on a May day. Calpurnia, whose fever had returned as the weather grew warmer, had

fallen into a nervous trembling when her father would have gone down to the Senate, and had implored him with tears not to leave her. Piso—who keenly felt that the deliberations of the Senate were little more than a farce—readily yielded, and even Aemilia never suspected there was any other reason for this request than a sick girl's fancy. But Calpurnia knew many things—some false, some true—which were being said more or less under men's breath, in the streets of Rome—things religiously kept from Aemilia. Calpurnia's little maid, Laelia, brought her in, at second or third hand, indeed, and often inaccurately, the talk of the wine-shops—how people were saying that the voice which was heard at the Shows had nothing whatever to do with Aristarchus the Christian, but was to have been the signal for some of the Senators to assassinate Domitian.

But this morning, as Laelia was brushing Calpurnia's hair, she said something which almost terrified her out of her senses. Calpurnia had been thinking about Aulus, and was not attending to Laelia's chatter, till the words, "I wonder who they are going to take up?" caught her ear.

"What are you saying about taking up, Laelia? Who is to be taken up?" she asked, her attention suddenly aroused.

"We don't know, Madam—some of the Senators,

perhaps, as they are to go to the Senate House," replied Laelia, beginning to plait Calpurnia's hair.

"What did you say about the man in the wine-shop? I was thinking of something else—tell me again," said Calpurnia, shaking her hair over her face, lest Laelia should remark her paleness.

"I only said, Madam, that there was a young Praetorian there, who picked a quarrel with the keeper of the wine-shop, and broke an amphora of wine——"

"Yes; but what has that to do with the Senate?" asked Calpurnia.

"Why, Madam, the shopkeeper was very angry. Dear me, Madam, how you are shaking. I'm afraid your fit is coming on before the time——"

"No," said Calpurnia; "go on. Tell me about the quarrel."

"Well, Madam, the shopkeeper flew in a rage, and then the Praetorian swore horribly, and dashed his cup on the ground, and said he would let them know that a Praetorian was not to be insulted, and that if the wine-seller did not take care, he should be served the same way as he was going to serve his betters to-morrow—that's to-day, Madam—for he and a maniple were going to the Senate House in the morning, and then people would see what they would see. But I think, Madam, he was drunk, and when

soldiers are drunk, they always brag. I really think, Madam, you should go to bed again——"

"I will lie down; but ask my father to come to me at once," said poor Calpurnia, sick with terror.

This was why Piso was not at the Senate that day.

It was just past noon, when Gratilla, all in disorder, and wrapped in a servant's cloak, which she had snatched up to disguise herself a little, knocked hurriedly at Piso's door, and rushing in without waiting to be announced, and calling wildly, "Piso! Aemilia!" made her way to the door of Calpurnia's room, before any of the servants could overtake her. As Piso rose from his daughter's bedside and hurried forward to see what was the matter, Gratilla sank down on a chair by the door, and clutching Piso's arm, gasped out, "Piso—my husband! Junius!"

"What is it, Gratilla? What has happened?" asked Piso—while Aemilia, pale as death, came running in.

"They are all arrested," panted Gratilla, who, what with her sobs and the breathlessness of her running, was almost suffocated. "At the Senate—this morning—my servants brought me word."

"There are all sorts of rumours about, Gratilla," began Piso.

"Oh," sobbed Gratilla, "it is true! Our steward Dionysius saw him with his own eyes."

As Gratilla spoke, Dionysius himself came in. He had evidently been running with all his might. "Dear mistress," he said, "the soldiers are coming up to our house. What will you do?"

"I will return home!" said Gratilla, springing up —though the instant before she had seemed quite exhausted. "Perhaps they have come to take me to him—or they may even be bringing him to his own house. Farewell, dear friends—you shall hear from us. I shall get into my house by the back-way."

"There is a short cut," said Dionysius. "If we hurry, we may arrive before the soldiers."

Gratilla was gone, leaving suspense and dismay behind her. The suspense was changed to certainty before long. Domitian had come into Rome that morning, and had gone to the Senate. Shortly afterwards, a body of Praetorians had marched into the Forum, and surrounded the Senate House. What had happened inside was variously related; but all agreed that Rusticus, Mauricus, Senecio, and the young Helvidius Priscus had been arrested. It was even said that Certus, a leading barrister, of Praetorian rank, had himself pulled Helvidius out of his seat.

But not for long were they left to perplex themselves with the suddenness of the catastrophe. A loud knock upon the great outer door resounded through the atrium, and penetrated to the inner chambers.

It was a messenger from the Emperor, commanding Piso's immediate attendance at the Palace.

Aemilia was not left undisturbed. She received a visit from Fulvia, who brought with her a train of admirers, and a Stoic philosopher, Sosthenes by name, whom Fulvia—as she informed Aemilia in a whisper—had just been so lucky as to get as tutor to her sweet Tiberius. This sudden outburst of maternal tenderness surprised Aemilia, who knew that the sweet Tiberius was an ill-conditioned and remarkably stupid youth of sixteen, whose existence Fulvia had hitherto done her best to ignore. Distracted as she was with anxiety, she yet observed that Sosthenes was a personable man, and that Cotilus appeared sulky. The care of Micipsa had been transferred to the Philosopher. Fulvia remarked that the little darling had been sick that morning, and desired Sosthenes to wrap him up more closely in his cloak.

"So fortunate to get him, my dear," she whispered to Aemilia, while Cornelia gravely conversed with Sosthenes on his method as a preceptor. "As I said to him, 'Look on my house as your own. In entrusting my darling child to you, I give you everything.' And then—that we might both feel quite easy—I made him fix his own salary. 'I know, Sosthenes,' said I, 'that you come from friendship, and not self-interest—but we *must* fix a sum. Now what do you think

would be fair? Of course, you'll have presents at the annual festivals—— ' "

A yelp from Micipsa interrupted Fulvia.

"Really, Sosthenes," she exclaimed sharply, "I never saw so awkward a fellow! You are worse than Cotilus. Cotilus, pray take him yourself! By-the-by, Aemilia, I am forgetting. What *is* the real truth about Arulenus? The most frightful rumours have been spread all day—I have even been assured that more arrests will be made to-morrow. Dear me, how thoughtless of me to tell you!" for Aemilia looked as if she was going to faint. "Surely your husband is not——"

"My son is at the Palace; Caesar sent for him as usual," said Cornelia, sternly, coming to her daughter-in-law's rescue. "And as for the rumours, Fulvia, we know less, I suppose, than you do. My granddaughter Calpurnia is very ill, and we seldom go out."

"Always so sweetly domestic, dear Cornelia," said Fulvia. Cornelia reddened at the familiarity. "But —if you'll excuse me, I really do think you shut Calpurnia up too much. She wants a little amusement. I'm sure *I* always feel dreadfully ill if I stop at home a day. Well, it is late, I must relieve you of the inconvenience—— Very sad about Rusticus, I'm sure; but *so* imprudent! They say all the family will

be banished. Well, good-bye, dear Aemilia, keep up your spirits. You should study philosophy—I've just begun. You must all come and hear Sosthenes read his paper. He calls it *Phalaris's Bull* and it's written to show that a philosopher can be just as happy while he's being burned alive in it, as anywhere else. You can't think how eloquent he is!"

Fulvia took her departure, leaving, as she intended to do, fresh suspense and fear behind her. Cornelia, who had scarcely been civil to her, openly declared her conviction that Fulvia was a spy, and had come hoping to surprise something out of them.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GAME OF DRAUGHTS.

Piso found the Emperor surrounded by a number of persons, among whom were Crassus and Regulus, walking in the New Portico, which he had not long completed. It was lined with slabs of phengites, so highly polished as to reflect objects almost as clearly as a mirror, and thus show Domitian what was happening behind him.

He still wore the purple toga, in which he always went to the Senate. He was much flushed, and the scorbutic affection to which he was subject was more apparent than usual—exacerbated by the rage into which he had lately worked himself. But at this moment, so far from being in a rage, he appeared particularly gentle and subdued.

"Congratulate me, my dear Piso," he said, as soon as he saw Piso. "I have discovered—just in time—who the villains are who have been conspiring against me. Not only men, but women, Piso—women! are

among the number of these criminals! Well, what do you say?" Domitian—who was evidently exciting himself to a fresh access of fury by these words—as a lion stirs himself up by lashing his tail—fixed his large dim eyes on Piso, with an expression which made Piso's blood run cold. He gave himself up for lost; but his very despair nerved him.

"What can I say, Caesar?" he replied with a firmness which astonished the crowd of sycophants, and made Regulus whisper to Crassus, "By the Infernal Gods, Publius, your cousin is a bold man!"

"I know nothing," continued Piso, "I do not know what has been discovered. I had not left my house this morning when you commanded my attendance."

"Your relatives—that is, your wife's relatives—Rusticus and Mauricus, are among them," said Domitian, with that mildness which Piso had so often been told was ominous. "Herennius Senecio, too—he did not write the life of that insolent old sedition-monger Helvidius for nothing! And young Helvidius—by the Gods, Piso, you are unfortunate in your friends! Gratilla, and Fannia, too—Fannia thinks she is to go on playing Arria all her life——"

At this moment, the Empress Domitia entered the portico, followed by attendants carrying her chair. She hurried up to Domitian, saying, "What is this

that I hear, Sir? I knew not what to fear—thank the Gods, I see you safe!"

"So, my little Domitia, you would not have had me murdered by these wicked wretches?" he said, with a sort of ferocious tenderness. In spite of her notorious infidelity with Paris the Pantomime, and his own scandalous connection with his niece Julia—now dead—Domitia had reasserted her empire over him.

Domitia sat down in her ivory chair, and her attendants arranged her mantle upon her knees. She was pale, and her eyes looked scared. Piso thought she wished to speak to him, but Crassus had taken his arm.

"I warned you," he whispered, very low—Domitian had just turned to Parthenius, who had come in. Then aloud, he said to Regulus, who was looking at them rather suspiciously, "Your warning the other night has come true, Regulus."

"Only in part," said Regulus. "Many equally guilty have escaped—but not for long."

"You mean Pliny, I suppose," said Crassus.

"Never mind whom I mean," said Regulus, rudely—he was horribly afraid of being himself suspected, and wished to seem on bad terms with all Piso's party.

Piso tried to forget his own apprehensions in watch-

ing the faces of his companions. The courtiers, who followed Domitian at a respectful distance, were evidently not quite sure what kind of bearing it was safest to adopt. Sometimes they made foolish jests —sometimes they affected great concern. Regulus showed his own uneasiness by unusual brutality. He was rich, and it might be worth Domitian's while to have him accused. Crassus alone was like himself— cool, sarcastic, and polite, with the politeness—and also with the watchfulness—of a courtier.

Presently Domitian, who had dismissed Parthenius, called for a draught-board, and sent the little boy with the great head—who, with the lion, was in attendance on him—to invite Piso to a game. A couch stood beneath the portico, and Domitian made Piso sit beside him, while Crassus and the rest looked on. Domitian talked to the Empress from time to time—her chair was close to the head of his couch— and his remarks, which ran chiefly on the scene of the morning, were not calculated to allay Piso's fears.

"Yes; they thought themselves secure," he said, pausing in the act of placing a draughtsman. "They thought I was going to fall into their trap—but, instead of that, they fell into mine. Rusticus was speaking when Norbanus entered the Senate"—Piso fancied that Domitian's eyes were upon him, but he availed himself of its being his turn to move, and

kept his own fixed upon the board. "Every one looked at Norbanus in astonishment," continued Domitian, "and I saw some turn pale who can have had no occasion to fear—since a just prince strikes only the guilty"—there was a horrible gentleness in Domitian's tones as he said this.

"It is your move, Piso. They know, too, how I have ever been inclined to clemency. If you had seen the look of baffled rage on Senecio's face when Norbanus laid his hand upon him!" As Domitian spoke, the Praefect of the Praetorians came into the portico. "Well, Norbanus, what news do you bring me?" said the Emperor, turning to Norbanus so abruptly that he disarranged the pieces on the board.

"Your enemies, Caesar, are committed to prison, and are in safe custody," replied Norbanus.

"Alas! that men will be so perverse!" cried Domitian. "I call you to witness, Piso, that I was forced to this!"

"According to your orders, Caesar," continued Norbanus, "Mauricus is kept apart. The female prisoners are under ward in their own houses, where they await your further commands."

"They shall have a trial," said Domitian. "As I happened to find them out before they murdered me, they shall have a trial. Where is Clodianus?"

"He is on guard, Caesar, as usual," replied Norbanus.

"Fetch him in," said Domitian to the great-headed boy, who, rising, rolled himself like a ball to the doorway, and dived beneath the curtain, which was presently put aside, and a tall and remarkably handsome young man, in the dress of a cornicularius, or tribune's adjutant, entered, and saluting, stood before the Emperor. If Hylas—who envied him—could have seen him now, he would indeed have thought him a lucky fellow—so magnificent was he with the great brass boss on his breast. Piso, looking at him with the interest one cannot help feeling in a splendid specimen of humanity, remarked the fearless expression of his countenance. It was, he thought, not without a possibility of ferocity, which the further experience of life might develop. But at present, there was visible on his face only the good-humour which comes of perfect physical well-being and the conscious possession of unusual bodily strength. His muscular limbs were worthy of a gladiator, but his face was of a far higher type than was often seen in a gladiator, and as he and Piso glanced at each other, each thought, "This is a magnificent specimen of a man."

But the words of Norbanus had filled Piso with terror. Who were these female prisoners? Could

his mother be implicated? He felt his hand tremble as he placed a draughtsman. He could not resist an almost uncontrollable impulse to ask Domitian who these women were; but when he moved his lips, no sound issued. The extreme tension of the last two hours had been so great as even to affect his bodily strength. Besides a thousand indefinite fears, besides the more distinct warnings of Crassus, and the dangerous dilemma in which he stood with regard to his daughter's marriage, he dreaded lest Cornelia should have ventured on any overt act which might now be construed into treason. So his tongue clave to his jaws, and his voice died in his throat. And still Domitian kept him there, through hours of agonized suspense—talking darkly of conspiracies and treasons, and of the swift punishment which overtakes them, but, whether by accident or design, never uttering the names of those women who were awaiting their trial. Domitian was a master of these refinements of torture. To keep Piso on the rack in the Palace, and his family in the anguish of suspense at home, was even better than his favourite old amusement of killing flies. These larger flies gave more sport by far.

So he reclined among his embroidered cushions, sometimes pinching Domitia's cheek, or pulling the hair of the large-headed boy, who, perched on the

end of the couch, amused himself by pulling a wool ball to pieces, while the lion lay at the foot of the column close by, and watched with half-shut eyes, and Domitia ate sweetmeats, and rolled a globe of amber in her hands, and looked at a tray of coral which her steward Stephanus brought in. Spendophorus, Caesar's armour-bearer, sat on the ground beside Domitian's couch, with a wreath of roses on his head, his beautiful womanish face close to Piso's elbow. It filled the cup of Piso's humiliation, that on the day of Rusticus's arrest, he must play at draughts with Domitian, while Spendophorus watched the game.

Meanwhile, Crassus, looking from one to another of all these persons, tried to calculate the imminence of his own danger, and involuntarily felt for his ring —and finding his finger bare, thought with a shudder that he was without defence. He hated pain even more than death, and here he had had a method of dying with no more pain than swallowing a crust—so at least the Ephesian apothecary of whom he bought the poison had sworn to him.

The prisoners had, as usual, the mockery of a trial. Arulenus was charged with having published a panegyric on Thrasea; Senecio, with having justified Helvidius the Elder; the younger Helvidius for having reflected upon the Empress Domitia in his

interlude of *Paris and Oenone*. But underneath these charges the informers insinuated hints of a widespread conspiracy, which it was not as yet expedient to discover more fully. The aged Arria, Gratilla, and Fannia were included in these charges.

They were all found guilty. Arulenus, Senecio, and Helvidius were put to death in prison. Mauricus and the women were banished. The seditious works were burnt by the Triumvirs in the Forum; and the Senate, looking round on the vacant places, listened trembling to a speech Domitian made them on his own justice and clemency.

"Let us flee, Lucius," said Aemilia that night, as they sat upon their bed, whispering low for fear of eavesdroppers—she cold and trembling, he gloomy and silent. "Let us leave all, and flee, you and I, and our children!"

But Piso replied sadly, "Alas, my poor Aemilia, whither shall we flee from the Roman eagles?"

His strong, warm arms were around her, but she shuddered. How soon might those hands be cold in death! How soon might that noble form be lying stark and dishonoured, as the body of her uncle lay now!

"Alas!" she moaned. "Why was I born? Why did I live to see this day? What have we done, that the Gods afflict us thus?"

With fresh vaunts of clemency, Domitian ordered the bodies of the victims to be given up to their friends. The funeral obsequies were celebrated at night—*funera tacita*, without musicians or mourners, the biers carried by common undertakers' men. Young Quintus Rusticus, who was not banished with his mother, performed these last offices for his father.

So universal was the belief that Piso was involved in this real or imaginary conspiracy, that for many days after the executions his house was deserted by the clients who had thronged it. These persons adroitly excused themselves, when — finding the thunderbolt did not fall, but, on the contrary, Piso's favour increased at Court—they again presented themselves, by sympathetically shaking their heads, and murmuring that under the late sad occurrences they had been unwilling to intrude; with still less articulate mumblings about the sacredness of grief and their own deep concern at their noble patron's affliction. To all these condolences, Piso replied by courteously thanking the gentlemen for the kindness they expressed, and assuring them that their absence had not been misunderstood.

Piso's clients, however, were not entirely satisfied with his reception of their apologies. Whether or not there had lurked a sarcastic meaning in his words was the subject of a hot discussion between two of

them at the Baths next day. The quarrel waxed hot—one maintaining that Piso was a mere stupid soldier, unused to town life, and incapable of seeing beyond the end of his nose; the other charging him with an insufferable arrogance, and contempt for his fellow-citizens, which his politeness only made more insufferable. "Why did he not give entertainments?" asked this person—a long, lean fellow, a notary by profession, son of a freedman of Corbulo's, the Empress's father. "Because of his pride, of course! Why did he not give a Show? Because he despised the people, and did not care to please them! Why did he look with such cold, glassy eyes on the clients who honoured him with their support? Why did he stick them down to dinner by themselves, and never invite them to dine with *him?* Shall I tell you why, Laevinus? His pride—his stinking pride! And this is the sort of fellow—a new Tarquinus Superbus, in fact—whom some people talk of for the next Em——"

The speaker suddenly found a wet sponge being stuffed into his mouth. "You Tartarean fool! You raven of Styx!" hissed Laevinus—a short, fat man, who hardly appeared capable of displaying so much energy. "Are you drunk? Would you ruin us all?"

"There was nobody near us," stammered the

other, looking foolish. "And, after all, there was no harm—I was saying I didn't want him——"

"Hold your tongue, ass that you are!" cried the other. "To try and teach you discretion is like washing a brickbat! Get on your toga, do, and let us go to dinner!"

But the toga was nowhere to be found. One of those enterprising persons who hung about baths, perceiving that the owner's attention was wholly engrossed by his argument, had successfully made off with it. The loss was not an unmixed misfortune. The toga was in reality nothing particular; but its bereaved owner never ceased to lament it as "the finest texture of a toga he ever saw. Could not find another to equal it, my dear Sir, for love or money; in fact, the best toga in Rome"—until the wicked Martial said that Domitius ought to be very much obliged to the thief, since he had made him a present of the finest toga in Rome.

CHAPTER XV.

CREDAT JUDAEUS.

From this time forward, men held their breath, as those who saw the sword hanging over their heads. The informers plied their trade more busily, more openly than ever. The cold relentless cruelty of Tiberius waited to be provoked. Caligula's thirst for blood was that of a homicidal maniac, who has no particular end to serve, but delights in mischief for its own sake. Nero was another madman; but his was the madness of vanity in its first origin—all his unnatural crimes had their root in vanity. There was something of all these human monsters in Domitian—as deep a dissimulator as Tiberius; as full of furious instincts as Caligula; as vain as Nero; as sensual as them all. Nothing shows more clearly the baseness of the Praetorians than their attachment to an Emperor, who, with all these vices, was not only destitute of military talent, but, as every one knew, wanted the supreme Roman quality of physical

courage—that quality, which, with a Roman, was a habit rather than an impulse.

The Senate, now long used to fawn on its Caesars, had no sword with which to defend its honour, or even its existence. Sixteen thousand Praetorians were too great odds. The blood of Arulenus and Senecio and Helvidius remained unavenged.

In spite of the danger of showing sympathy for a condemned person, Piso had put on mourning, and all that Messala could obtain from him was a promise to remain at home, and not to show himself in the streets in a black robe.

These events had a terrible effect on Aemilia. Piso perceived it, and endeavoured to comfort her. She looked at him with a piteous smile. "Lucius," she said, "do you know what I thought just now? Tryphosa had caught a mouse in the trap. I saw him, and each separate hair was standing up, like the quills of the porcupine, so terrified was the poor little beast at the expectation of what should happen to it. We are like that mouse, Lucius, waiting in the trap until he sends and orders us to be given to the cat."

"My dearest Aemilia! my love! my delight!" said Piso, moved to tears. "It kills me to see you thus!"

"It is fear for you, Lucius. *I* could die," she said, and the fear went out of her eyes as she spoke.

"A little sooner or a little later, Aemilia, death comes to us all," said Piso. "'Tis but the thinking which makes it seem such a mighty difference whether we die to-morrow by the sword, or live to be eaten up with the gout, like poor Corellius—who said to me the other day that, but for desiring to outlive Domitian, he would at once put an end to his torments."

"I am a woman—not a philosopher, Lucius," said Aemilia. "Death is to me a frightful thing. I have sometimes almost wished I had never been born, since I must die. Perhaps, when one is old, death may seem less abhorrent. But now, when life beats high in our hearts, how can I but hate death? And yet," she cried, in a sudden revulsion, "I was wishing but now we could all die together!"

Meanwhile, Crassus ceased to press his suit. Recent events had led him to doubt the policy of allying himself with Piso. Crassus had been terribly uneasy ever since the trial of Apollonius, lest a certain correspondence with him and other persons in Asia should be brought to light. He contented himself with keeping a watch on all his cousin's movements. He had just heard something which was a warning to those who allowed themselves to become too conspicuous—Sallustius Lucullus, Agricola's successor in Britain, had just been put to death for permitting

some spears of a new fashion to be called after him.

Domitian now sent more often for Piso, and would detain him for hours at a time—sometimes challenging him to trials of skill, at ball, or archery; sometimes reading verses of his own composition, and insisting on Piso's opinion. Crassus was very often present on these occasions, and with him Domitian discussed the ordering of Games and of public and private entertainments. It sometimes happened that Piso was permitted to retire when the Emperor took his siesta, and he then usually paid a visit to Flavius Clemens. One afternoon, Piso found Flavius closeted with a very venerable old man, with somewhat of the appearance of a philosopher, who made as though he would depart, but Flavius detained him, saying, "My friend Piso is himself much interested in this subject."

"I imagine," said Piso, with a wave of his hand towards the volumes which lay open on the table, and even on the floor, "that I interrupt a philosophical discussion."

"You need not interrupt it, unless you will," said Flavius Clemens. "We are trying to discover the manner in which the ancients thought of death—some such questions you and I, Lucius, have often debated. How say you, is death a good or an evil?"

"Socrates taught us long ago that we do not know,

Flavius—that, for anything we know, it may be the greatest good."

"And do you agree with him?" asked Flavius.

"I cannot tell you," said Piso. "Nay; if I am to answer honestly, I fear I do not. It is true we *know* little; but all that we do know appears to me to go against that idea of Socrates, that death is a good. To some, no doubt—to persons hopelessly diseased, or worn out by age, to slaves, and to the unhappy, whoever they are, death is good; but this is only to evade the question, and say that death is good, if life is evil."

"And life—is that good or evil? Remember our old discussions," said Flavius.

"Alas! Flavius, what can I answer? How can a thing be called good that is subject to so many calamities, and inevitably doomed to decay? It is like a noble mansion haunted by a spectre."

"'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,'" said the stranger, who had been listening in silence.

"That is an admirable saying," said Piso. "To which of the Philosophers do we owe it?"

"You would scarcely call him who said it a Philosopher," replied the stranger. "Yet he was a Hebrew King, and the wisest man of his time."

"He agreed, then, with the Stoics and the Cynics in his views of life?" said Piso. "Yet theirs is a

view which has always perplexed my common sense. To say that death is better than life—nothing than something, is surely unreasonable, if not absurd."

"When Socrates spoke of death as a good, he looked for a better life, free from the pains and calamities of this," said Clemens.

"He says it is a good, even if the dead are as nothing," said Piso. "And in proof he instances those nights in which we have no dreams as the best nights of all."

"Yes; and then he adds, 'but if the things told us be true, and in Hades we may talk with Orpheus, and Musaeus, and Hesiod, and Homer, and Palamedes, and Telamonian Ajax, I would die many times for this.' Think of it, Lucius—Socrates said he would die many times, to talk with Homer and the heroes of old!"

"If one were fully persuaded of this, Flavius, death would undoubtedly be a great good," said Piso. "But who shall tell us if it be true? There comes no Orpheus, or Theseus, or Aeneas now, to tell us the secrets of Hades."

The stranger had been searching among the rolls, and now opened one of them.

"Listen," he said, "to what Cicero makes the Elder Cato say of a life after death. 'I am persuaded that your fathers, Publius Scipio and Caius Laelius, men of the greatest eminence, and very dear

friends of mine, are living—and that life too which alone deserves the name of life.' And, again—it is still Cato who speaks—'Do you suppose I should have undergone such great toils, had I thought to limit my glory with my life? Would it not have been far better to pass an easy and quiet life, without any toil or struggle? And indeed, unless souls were immortal, the souls of the noblest men would not aspire above all things to an immortality of glory.' And, again, in that piece called *The Dream of Scipio*, in which the spirit of the Elder Africanus appears to Africanus the Younger, do you not remember how Cicero makes Africanus ask if his father Paullus Aemilius is still alive? And the apparition replies, 'To be sure, for the dead have escaped from the fetters of the body, as from a prison.'"

"To all this," said Piso, with a grave and melancholy smile, "I will reply with another of the disputations of Cicero—it is in that one of the Tusculans, called *Of the Contempt of Death*. 'While I read, I assent; but when I have laid down the book, all that assent deserts me.'"

"You say well," said the old man, fixing his keen eyes on Piso. "Man can at best but feel after this hope—though, as Cicero says again, 'somehow or other, there clings to our minds a certain presage of future ages.' And whether Pherecydes or Pythagoras

first taught this hope to the Greeks, it is certain that all nations have expected a judgment to come—and if a judgment, then a life after death."

"If it be so," said Piso, "and we have what Cicero calls a retreat and a haven prepared for us, I can say with him, 'I would we could crowd all sail and arrive at it!' for it often seems to me that as, not Cicero only, but many other Philosophers, have said, this present life is really death."

The stranger looked at Clemens.

"Yes, speak, Nicodemus," he said; "but let us first make sure we are not overheard."

* * * * * *

"Is it permitted to me to speak plainly, without giving offence?" said Piso, when Nicodemus had finished speaking.

"Pray speak without restraint, Piso," replied Nicodemus.

"Well, then," said Piso, "it seems to me that both the credible and the incredible parts of your story are by no means new. Both the Greeks and ourselves—and also the Egyptians—believed that the Gods manifested themselves in human shapes—nay, even in those of beasts. Jupiter and Mercury supped with Philemon and Baucis—there is nothing new here——"

"Is it necessary, Piso, that truth should be new?" asked Nicodemus.

"Nay," said Piso, "I do not say that. But you make so much of this manifestation of God in the flesh—as though every God of Olympus hăd not worn human shape in the songs of the poets. Our simpler-minded forefathers, untrained to reflection, found no difficulty in receiving these stories. A more enlightened age smiles at them, as pretty tales to send children to sleep with, but even the children nowadays do not seriously expect to meet Diana hunting in the heart of the forest."

"But for what purposes, Piso, were these metamorphoses? Rarely indeed for anything else than to gratify lust! What stories do the poets tell of their Olympus? Compare these with the life of Jesus Christ—he pleased not himself; he did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. He went about doing good——"

"I confess, Nicodemus," said Piso, "that your God compares favourably in these respects with the deities of Homer and Vergil. I am willing to admit that he was a wise teacher and a skilled physician. But when you ask me to acknowledge him as a God, that is another thing! Why, they say that Apollonius of Tyana himself not only does not claim divine honours, but asserts that his extraordinary performances are not miracles. Indeed, I heard him say so himself at his trial. I suppose he, a singularly astute man, saw

that as a vulgar wonder-worker he sank to the level of the Chaldaeans, whereas by asserting that his wonders were only due to the purity of his life, he raised himself to the rank of a philosopher. Your Jewish prophet, however, seems to have made the most extravagant claims—which, had he been as clever a man as Apollonius, he must have seen would ruin him with all sober persons."

"Why so, Piso?"

"Is it credible," asked Piso, "that one who was born among a barbarous people—a Jew—of a nation of runaway and leprous slaves——"

"That is false!" said Nicodemus, the indignant blood mounting to his aged cheeks. "We are the most ancient of nations, and can trace our origin to the creation of the world. You will say next that we worshipped an ass——"

"Nay; my father was with Pompey when he entered the Temple at Jerusalem," said Piso, "and it has been handed down in our family that in the inmost shrine they found no image whatever."

"Our God is He that dwelleth between the Cherubim," said Nicodemus—"the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for evermore."

"It is impossible, Nicodemus, that a Roman can

accept a Jew for his God—a common handicraftsman, too—— "

"We think it no disgrace to labour with our hands," said Nicodemus; "as Paul saith, 'He that will not work, let him not eat.' Yet Christ was of the lineage of the ancient Kings of Judah. Socrates was the son of a midwife, and you do not therefore refuse to listen to him."

"Socrates was a Greek—an Athenian," said Piso. "Had your prophet been a Greek, we might have heard what he had to say."

"Yet shall the nations come to His light, and all peoples shall serve Him," said Nicodemus.

"A Jew! ignorant of philosophy—who never, you say, set foot out of Judaea!" said Piso. But he did not speak with contempt; he spoke merely in a tone of remonstrance at the madness of Nicodemus's pretensions. "If what you have told me of him be true," he continued, "I willingly give him the honour due to a wise and virtuous man, the victim of injustice and envy. I am indeed irresistibly reminded of Socrates. But, whereas Socrates said of himself that he knew nothing, and that all he could do for his disciples was to teach them their own ignorance, your prophet said he could give eternal life to those who received him, and that, though the whole Kosmos should pass away, *his* words should remain! I find

in him at once an astonishing presumption and an astonishing humility. All his promises, I observe, are made to the humble. I understand now why his disciples have made proselytes among the common people. The miserable and the oppressed are naturally attracted by the idea of a suffering God. But it is evident he had nothing to say to a great and prosperous people like the Romans—although from what you tell me, he does not appear to have shared his countrymen's hatred of us. To imagine that he could ever exercise any such influence over the world at large as Democritus, or Socrates, or Plato, or Epicurus have done, is quite preposterous! By the way, it is singular that in his appeal to the unlearned he resembles Epicurus. That flattery of the unlearned has always displeased me in Epicurus."

"Yet, Lucius," said Flavius, "was not Socrates constantly exposing the false knowledge of the Sophists? Did he not teach that every man has a natural reason within him—proving this by the questions he put to a slave?"

"He did, Flavius," replied Piso. "But——"

"But what?" asked Flavius.

"Why, Flavius," said Piso, hesitating a little, "although it is true there is something Socratic about this Jewish teacher, yet it appears to me absurd to compare his doctrines with those of the

divine Socrates. Then this incredible story of his resurrection——"

"It is because we are sure of *that*, that we dare believe his words," said Nicodemus.

"Yet you admit that it is only on hearsay evidence——"

"I have seen and talked with those who saw Him alive after His passion," said Nicodemus, and something in his tone impressed Piso in spite of himself. "They are scattered throughout the world, to be the witnesses of eternal life. His most beloved disciple, John the son of Zebedee, is still alive at Ephesus——"

Piso looked at Flavius Clemens, and something like a groan broke from him. Crassus had mentioned this old man as the chief instrument whereby Aulus had been made a proselyte.

"He was the youngest of the Twelve," continued Nicodemus, "and he has outlived all the rest. There are some who say that he shall not die, but shall tarry until the Lord come again, that he may be a witness of the Resurrection to those who come after us."

Piso seemed scarcely to hear him. He sat for a time absorbed in thought, and neither Flavius Clemens nor Nicodemus cared to disturb him. After a time, he rose and went to the window—whence he could see the Capitol—and stood there for some time.

"I confess, Nicodemus, that I was over-hasty just now," he said. "There is a strange fascination in this offer of eternal life. A life in which we might make up for the miseries and disappointments of this, and become, as Cicero says, either Gods ourselves, or the companions of Gods. It would certainly enable a man to endure calamity with fortitude, if he could believe that. This life would then be only, as it were, the vestibule to the Temple, and we should greatly desire to cross the threshold. But yet, of all you have told me, that which most astounds me is that a man who stands upon the very steps of the throne of the world has been persuaded to receive the doctrines of the Hebrew philosopher. I suppose that what you said about his reigning over the kings of the earth was suggested to you by the fact that Clemens has become a Christian?"

"The words were not my own, Piso," replied Nicodemus. "They are the words of a great Prophet of our nation, who uttered them eight centuries ago."

"I have heard you have some ancient books," said Piso; "but I always supposed they were magical."

"Magic was forbidden to the Jews, as it is to the Christians," said Nicodemus.

"The Christians appear to me to be a perfectly harmless sort of people," said Piso, "and, from what you say, bear no ill will to mankind as the Jews do.

But their intolerance of other deities will be fatal to them: not content with requiring us to acknowledge their Gods, they demand that we shall reject our own, and, with them, all the traditions of antiquity. If we hardly now believe in Jove himself, how can you expect us to believe in a new God, whose birth living men can remember? No; whatever the merits of your doctrines—and I see some things to admire in them—they are entirely unfitted to be the religion of the Roman Empire; it is utterly impossible in the very nature of things."

CHAPTER XVI.

HYLAS.

Hylas was in a very bad temper. Till his master had bought Chione at Aegina, he himself had been the favourite minion. And now he was slighted—Crassus, adding insult to injury, had even told him the other day (when Hylas complained of being treated with coldness) that his beard was growing, and that he could not expect to be petted for ever. Crassus had called him "a great stubbly fellow," and given him a denarius to go and be shaved. Hylas dashed the denarius on the ground, and ran out of the room, crying and stamping with rage, at which Crassus laughed immoderately. It was a gross calumny—although perhaps Hylas's chin was not quite as smooth as it had been a year ago, there was nothing to be seen, and, as for his upper lip, he had no more down there than darkens the lip of many a brunette, and is reckoned becoming. Hylas hated Chione; he had hated her as soon as he saw her.

For all that, he had tried to kiss her at a very early stage of their acquaintanceship, and she had boxed his ears, and called him a monkey, on which Hylas had called *her* a red-haired monster, and ever since had addressed her as Rufina. There was a good deal of petty feminine spite in this pretty boy who had so long been his master's plaything. Chione had hinted at there being disgrace in a youth thus delighting in becoming the plaything of his master, and Hylas, who loved softness, and silkiness, and ease, and pampering, and asked nothing better than to remain a minion, hated her for it with a hatred of which one might have supposed so soft a thing incapable.

Hylas about this period of his life spent all his leisure—that is, all the time he could spare from attendance on his master, and from bathing, kneading, anointing, and depilating his own ivory limbs—in studying himself in the mirror, to see if possible whether he really had begun to go off. The bright, soft bloom on his cheeks seemed to him to be as softly bright as ever—or very nearly so. Hylas removed the mirror a dozen times, to get a better light, and make sure on this point. He approached so near in his investigations that his breath dulled the polished surface of the steel; he put a napkin over his mouth; and again closely inspected himself, and found himself a charming, pretty fellow, and wished

his name had been Narcissus—a name of good omen for a pretty fellow, whose face and figure were to be his fortune, and an enormous great fortune too—whereas there never was a Hylas that came to greatness. "Why didn't they call me Narcissus—or Pallas?" he thought, as he drew his fingers through the ambrosial curls which clustered round his perfectly formed head.

Hylas was excessively idle, and a coward to boot; but he had often meditated on the possibility of wreaking vengeance on his haughty rival, who perhaps had done unwisely in wounding his vanity so deeply. He had gone to the length—in a paroxysm of fury after one of their quarrels—of stifling a spotted lizard in her pot of unguent. He carefully scraped every atom of ointment off the creature, and replaced it carefully, smoothing the unguent with a strigil; but he could not help seeing that the pot looked suspicious, and as though it had been tampered with. Probably Chione thought so too, and threw it away, or perhaps she used an antidote—a pounded scorpion is the best, as a lizard left to putrefy in oil is the best remedy for a scorpion bite. At any rate, the fairness grown so hateful to Hylas, that he experienced a physical loathing whenever he saw it, remained unblemished.

What maddened Hylas most was the knowledge

that the peculiar bloom of boyhood which had been his glory—had not his master's friends called him a "divine boy," and said that Ganymede was not more beauteous when Jove snatched him away to Olympus?—must shortly give place to the more commonplace good looks of manhood. Crassus had always said, "It is this evanescent charm of yours, Hylas, for which I love you. It will not last, so I adore you for it. When your beard is grown, I shall, if you are good, make you the chief of the tricliniarii."

When Crassus spoke thus, Hylas hated him too. Sooner than be degraded to the rank of a household slave, he would kill himself, he said. But Hylas was not of the stuff of those who kill themselves. Desperation might perhaps have led him to poison somebody else—if the opportunity was very safe—but he would have had no pleasure in the deed. And as for shedding blood, the very thought of it made him sick. But if he could suggest to some one else some action whereby his desired end could be attained, that was another matter. Hylas did not mind in the least what was done, so long as *he* did not do it. If he had heard that Chione was dead, he would have rejoiced. But to see her swollen and blackened corpse would have almost killed him with horror. That was the worst of poison—people swelled so horribly, and made such frightful corpses. It was

really a great pity that we could not kill our enemies simply by wishing them ill—if we wished long enough and earnestly enough, then they should vanish from view, and not leave an ugly lump of dead flesh for us to get rid of somehow. Of course, there are the witches and charms; but then there are counter-charms, and people find you out, or the witch betrays you—and you are had up for murder, and crucified before you know where you are. But if any one could find the secret of *wishing*, it could not be brought home to you, and there would be no unpleasantness at all.

Hylas used to look at Chione, when he waited on her—as he had to do of late, whenever she supped with Crassus, which was whenever Crassus was alone—and if looks could poison and thoughts could choke, Chione would have fallen dead from the couch. How Hylas hated the white feet from which he had to pull the slippers!

"How rough you are, Hylas; you will break my toe!" Chione would cry. "What a monkey you are!"

"He had better take care. Now his beard is growing, I don't prize him too much to have him whipped," Crassus had said, as he peeled an apple. "There, I have made you a serpent," he said, taking up the rind, which hung in an unbroken series of the thinnest

spirals between his delicate finger and thumb, and handing it to Chione. "You can play on the lute; but you cannot peel an apple like that."

Hylas saw himself forgotten, while Crassus toyed thus with the fair Aeginetan, and his blood seethed in his blue veins.

It happened that the next morning an officer of the Palace came with a message from Domitian to Crassus. It was about something connected with a banquet to be given to a select few in the Mica, and the officer had to wait for an answer. Hylas, passing through the atrium, saw a stately person sitting upon a bench, looking straight before him. He was a young man, very handsome, and of a very powerful figure, and Hylas, who believed himself to be irresistible, and was as much of a coquet as if he had been a woman, must needs come dancing up, and begin a conversation.

"What splendid armour! You are in the Palace? How fine it must be! How I envy you! What a lovely sword! Does Domitian ever make you a present? Are you on guard at the banquets? Oh, what luck you are in!"

Thus he prattled, and the young Praetorian, half amused, half admiring the pretty, impudent boy, replied in a like vein.

"Lucky to him that is lucky," he said. "We

have long hours in the Palace, and have to look uncommon sharp, I can tell you. It would never suit a lazy-bones like you."

"How do you know I am a lazy-bones?" asked Hylas, pouting. "What is your name? You are not a Roman."

"I am from Reate—old Vespasian's country," said the soldier. "My name is Clodianus, very much at your service, my young jackanapes. And what, pray, is yours?"

"Hylas," said the boy; "but I wish it had been Narcissus."

"Ah! I dare say, now, you are in love with yourself? You are, I *will* say, a sweet pretty youth, and by the way you're decked out, scented, curled, and all that, I suspect your master thinks so too."

"He used to like me once," said Hylas, bursting to confide his wrongs; "but now my nose is out of joint."

"Ha! ha! another sweet pretty youth, I suppose?" said Clodianus, laying his finger to his nose, and winking intelligently.

"No; would you believe it? It is a girl this time. He bought her at Aegina. Hateful place, I wish we had never gone there!" said Hylas.

"Is she so pretty?" asked Clodianus.

"A pasty-faced thing—big, clumsy—*I* don't admire

her at all," said Hylas, making a face. "Some people might think her well enough; but *I* see very little in her. She sings to the lute—my voice *is* just beginning to break, you know, so she scores one there, confound her! Then she makes the master laugh—she has an infernal tongue of her own! I hate her!"

"So it seems," said Clodianus, smiling at the boy's vehement spite. "What a little spitfire you are, Hylas! And does she admire you?"

"She? Oh, she calls me 'child' and 'monkey.' I should like"—Hylas clenched his fist and set his teeth—"I should like to—*kill* her!"

As he spoke, there was a slight noise at the farther end of the hall. Chione herself passed through. She appeared not to have known that any one was there, for, as she turned her face towards Clodianus and Hylas, she started, more colour came into her cheeks, she quickened her steps, and, without looking again, went out at another door.

"Who was that?" asked Clodianus, in a whisper.

"That's she of whom I spoke—Chione is her name," said Hylas, when the clinking of Chione's anklets had died away.

"What a divine creature!" exclaimed Clodianus. "'The goddess in her walk,' as I've heard somebody say. What hair! what shoulders——"

"You should see her hair when it's down," said Hylas. "Comes nearly to her feet. I don't like the colour——"

"You young fool! are you jealous?" said Clodianus—and there was a touch of anger in his tone. "And she can play the lute, you say? And she is witty? Get me speech of her—in private—and I'll give you five gold denarii."

"Swear it," said Hylas, his eyes dilating.

He had expensive tastes. Crassus was not lavish, and five gold pieces would be very welcome. Besides, was not this really a sort of fulfilment of his notion about *wishing* people into vanishing out of one's way? He rapidly sketched to himself the progress of an intrigue whereby he should be relieved for ever of the hated presence of Chione. With this in his head, he began to praise her to Clodianus—not scrupling to let it appear that his enmity had been inspired by rejected advances on his part. This would make Chione more interesting to Clodianus, and undo any effect his disparaging words might have had.

"She really is lovely!" he said, narrowly watching Clodianus, who had been completely smitten. "But so proud! Even Crassus, I know, can't get much out of her, so no wonder she turns up her nose at *me!*"

As Hylas said this, his slim figure drawn up to its extreme height, and a look of artless candour on his face, Clodianus burst out laughing so loud that Crassus, making a plan of the banqueting-hall in the library, heard the noise.

CHAPTER XVII.

ARICIA.

It was June. The games of Mars were past, the Vestal Virgins had thrown the effigies of the Argei from the Sublician Bridge, and the Temple of Vesta had been cleansed. The City was growing unhealthy. The Emperor had returned to Albanum, and those who were, or wished to be considered courtiers flocked thither after him. The less distinguished or the more independent went to Tibur, or Tusculum, or Praeneste, or took the baths at Ostia, or Laurentum, or Cajeta, and the more distant Campanian watering-places.

It had been intimated to Piso by the Chamberlain Parthenius that he was expected to go to his villa near Alba, in order to be at hand whenever the Emperor might desire to consult him. Parthenius hinted mysteriously that Flavius Clemens had displeased Domitian. "Your virtues, noble Piso," added the Chamberlain, in a flattering tone, "receive from our Lord and God the appreciation they deserve."

This unbecoming title—which it was well known, however, that Domitian liked—so much disgusted Piso, that he only bowed without replying, and Parthenius left him, more convinced than ever of Piso's haughty arrogance. Himself a freedman, he was peculiarly quick to perceive and imagine slights, and he deeply resented the reserve of Piso's manner.

The Villa Calpurnia was nearer to Aricia than to Bovillae. It commanded magnificent views over the plain of Latium and the Great Sea. The towers of Lanuvium, perched like a fortress on its hill, are fallen, the walls of Diomede are broken down, and Juno's altar is cold, but on the vine-clad heights where Caius Marcius fluttered their Volscians in Corioli, the vine clusters still ripen as they were ripening when Piso drove out to the Villa Calpurnia in the thirteenth year of Domitian.

The Villa stood a little above where the old Appian Way dips down to the great causeway. A private road climbed up the slopes of the Alban Mount, and here, on a ledge of rock, was the Villa, with a ravine on the farther side, falling down abruptly to the Grove and Temple of Diana and to the lake.

Here, among the hoary ilexes and olives and the vine-clad terraces, Aemilia and Calpurnia found again some shadow of the peace they had known at Baiae. They could fancy themselves a hundred miles

from the great world. Beneath them, the stream of carriages rattled over the causeway—going down to Capua, and Neapolis, and Baiae. But the sound of the wheels did not reach the Villa. Calpurnia wandered under the gnarled ilex boughs and the silver-gleaming olives, and dreamed her dreams almost as she had done at Baiae. A sense of something about to happen—of some end now drawing very near—gave a sharpness to her enjoyment of the cloudless summer days, when the sea of dust down below hung whiter and thicker, and the vine-leaves shrivelled in the sun, and all the laughing landscape stretched out before her, ridge after ridge of vineyards, down to the shore, and the all-compassing purple sea.

And here one day, when Domitilla came to visit them, Calpurnia took the wolf by the ears, and asked Domitilla to tell her all about the Christians.

"Why do you ask, Calpurnia?" said Domitilla.

"Because—because," stammered Calpurnia, with burning blushes—"because I so much wish to know."

"And why do you wish to know?" asked Domitilla, kindly.

Calpurnia burst into tears. "Oh! I cannot tell you," she said; "but I wish to know—and I thought perhaps you might be able to tell me. Do not be angry with me. You know what they say—and you

are so good, I am sure it is either not true, or else the Christians are not as bad as people say."

Domitilla found herself in a great strait. It was strictly forbidden to disclose the more sacred and mystic doctrines of the Gospel to those not prepared by a course of instruction to receive them, but it was permitted to tell enough to place herself in this girl's power—and, with herself, her husband and children. It was many years since there had been an actual persecution—not since Nero's time; but Aristarchus had just been thrown to the lions, and Domitilla knew that Domitian, who had banished the philosophers, would not spare the Christians.

"Are you offended with me?" asked Calpurnia, when Domitilla was still silent.

"Do you ask this from idle curiosity, Calpurnia? or for the sake of some other—or for your own?" said Domitilla. She thought it possible that Aemilia, who had once spoken to her on the subject, might have shown some interest in the Christians.

"For—— Oh, do not ask me why I ask!" said Calpurnia, in painful confusion. "It is not foolish curiosity. I—I wish to know for myself. Ever since I saw that old man die in the Amphitheatre I have wondered why he chose to die rather than sacrifice. You know what they say," she continued, her desire to learn something giving her a kind of desperate

courage, for Domitilla was a grave and dignified lady, and an emperor's granddaughter, and it was not easy to press her with questions. "You know people say that their mysteries are worse than those of the secret societies of Bacchus, which the Consul Postumius put down." As she referred to this awful story, now two hundred years old, Calpurnia's voice faltered, and she looked deprecatingly at Domitilla. "It is only what they say," she said, "and ever since I saw the old man slain, I have wondered whether *he* had done such things."

"Calpurnia, all these stories are entirely untrue," said Domitilla, who was herself far from calm. "I know what is said—that an ass's head is worshipped, and a new-born child sacrificed, and that they drink its blood and eat its flesh, as the sorcerers do in their incantations. But it is not true. The Christians worship the great God of heaven and earth, and they offer no sacrifice but prayer and thanksgiving, and obedience, and faith, and good works. And who are they who accuse them of abominable rites? The partakers in the worship of Cybele, and Isis, and Bacchus, and Flora, at whose festival a modest woman dare not be seen in the streets!"

"Julius told me it was horrible on Flora's days," said Calpurnia.

"Do you know, Calpurnia, that by the words I

have said I have placed my life in your hands?" said Domitilla. "You are young and inexperienced—innocent, too, I am sure; you may talk of these things to those who will talk again."

"Never, never, Domitilla! Do not think so ill of me! Am I a child?" said Calpurnia, distressed. "I thank you a thousand times for what you have told me, and I will believe no evil of the Christians, whatever I may hear. Be sure I will speak to no one—if you wish it, not even to my mother."

"I can trust your mother," replied Domitilla. "But do not speak to her now; it is better not. Hush! she comes."

As Calpurnia strolled slowly up and down with her mother and Domitilla, she was thinking that what Domitilla had said was like things she had heard her father say of the Pythagoreans, of whom every one spoke with respect. It certainly sounded beautiful and elevated, and if it had attracted Aulus it was no discredit to him. A load seemed removed from Calpurnia's mind. She slipped back into her old dreams, and peopled the steep winding paths of the Alban Mount and the vine-terraces and ilex-groves with the same invisible presences as of old. Often in the early morning, or the late evening, she would steal away up the hill, and sitting at the foot of an ancient oak, while the bees buzzed about the wild thyme, would

gaze far away, over the rich undulations of the plain —the hill of Corioli, the high, gleaming walls of Lanuvium, and the white villas studding the plain, far away to the distant sea—and imagine that she heard a footstep climbing up the rough path.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AN APPARITION.

There was a little door in the garden-wall of the Villa, close by the old walnut-tree which it was said Cicero had planted. This door was used only by the husbandmen going up to the olives and vines, and a narrow path led past it into the high-road in one direction, and on the other up to the vineyards and the open hillside. Calpurnia often came out this way, and sat in the wood. She felt quite safe—all the people about were her father's men, and the tower of the Villa was always in sight above the garden trees. One morning, as she sat thus, a shepherd came by. He was but a boy, and he stared at the lovely lady as though he thought he had come across a hamadryad. His clothes were ragged, and showed the brown skin through the rents, his hat was gaily decked with leaves and flowers and pheasant's feathers, and he was blowing on a Pan's pipe, his sheep all round him, as though the rude music attracted them.

Calpurnia watched this rustic Orpheus, until he and his sheep were lost among the ilex-boles, but the soft breeze still brought her snatches of his tune. When it had quite died away, Calpurnia herself began to sing in a low voice a little song which her nurse had taught her in Britain—a foolish, childish ditty, made still more unmeaning by the old Oscan refrain.

Somehow, it haunted Calpurnia to-day, and she still sang it as she descended the path to re-enter the grounds of the villa. It was a very hot day; the cicalas filled the air with their chirping, and, at every step Calpurnia took, the lizards, like living emeralds, darted away, rattling over last year's leaves like summer hail. They sat immovable on sunny stones till she was close by—then they vanished, with only a flash of shining scales to show they went. Calpurnia was walking under a vine-terrace, and the face of the terrace was alive with the lizards—lizards basking on the hot bare stones, lizards with their tails hanging out of the holes in the wall, lizards half hid under the creeping smilax—wherever you looked, something presently shot up or down, or in or out; and scarlet and violet butterflies flew in and out among the thorn-roses, and the white convolvulus, the broom, and the oleanders growing low on the hillside. The sweet scents of wild thyme and lavender, and the fainter breath of the roses, mingled

with the rarely-coming odours of the pines far up the hill. An open space to which she came was all overgrown with glossy-leaved myrtle-bushes just bursting into flower. The broom spread along the ridge in patches of gold, and invited the honey-bees; in shady places, by the tree-roots, or where in autumn little torrents ran down into the valley, the red and white lychnis and the purple loosestrife grew among the broad leaves of the flags. Calpurnia passed this wild part of the hill, and came to a belt of olives, where in spring the narcissus grew so plentifully that the ground was carpeted with white and gold. Terrace beyond terrace, the olives stretched down the hill, a sea of silver-green, exhaling light as the myrtles exhaled perfume. The face of every terrace was a tangle of white saxifrage, and here and there the tall foxgloves lifted up their empurpled spears. Sometimes a fig-tree gleamed white among the darker olive-boughs. And all the smiling hillside was full of warm sweet scents, and loud with the hum of bees and the cry of the cicalas. It was as though the whole mountain clapped its hands for joy of the summer day.

Calpurnia had never been so far from the Villa—and yet she was not far from it, but the paths went winding in and out, and up and down, and Calpurnia lingered, and went by the way that seemed the longest,

always guided by the white tower of the Villa. Beyond the olives a path led straight to the Villa. A vineyard lay below, and the husbandmen were trimming the vines. They were Piso's *agricolae*, and they saluted the young lady as she passed.

Although it was only the third hour, the air had already lost the first freshness of the morning, which had tempted Calpurnia on and on, further than she had ever been before. Now, as she looked straight before her along the path which ran like a ledge under the olive-terraces, she saw an old woman coming, a red handkerchief on her head; she walked with a stick, and led a little child by the hand. There was a tank for water in a place where the path grew wider, and the old woman sat down on the edge of the tank, and placed the child beside her. As Calpurnia came near, she observed that the old woman seemed very poor—her tunic much worn and ragged, she herself very old and feeble, and as though she had come from far. The child, too, seemed to be tired. It was a beautiful child, and reminded Calpurnia of Tertia—Tertia, after walking ten miles in the hot sun, with hair dusty and disordered by travel, and little feet footsore and bleeding, in spite of a pair of wooden sandals too large for her. Calpurnia made sure the old woman would beg of her—she slid her hand into her breast, and got

ready a small coin. But the old woman sat still on the edge of the tank, looking very weary and overborne by the heat, but neither stretching out her hand nor asking any alms.

"Have you travelled far?" asked Calpurnia, as she came up.

"From Terracina, my little lady," replied the old woman.

"And are you going to Rome?"

"Yes, Madam." The child, pleased with the fringe on Calpurnia's dress, stretched out her little hand to touch it. "Let the young lady's dress alone, Theophila," said the old woman. "It is rude to touch."

"Is she your granddaughter?" asked Calpurnia—to whom the name Theophila had brought a thrill of fear.

"My great-granddaughter," said the old woman.

"And is her mother dead?" asked Calpurnia, struck by her sorrowful tone.

"I do not know," replied the old woman. "I have not seen her for three years, and I am going to Rome to find her, because I have heard she is there."

"What countrywoman are you?" asked Calpurnia. "You are neither a Roman nor an Italian, I think?"

"I am a Jewess of Thessalonica," replied the old woman.

Calpurnia started, and was just going to ask, "Is your granddaughter named Theophila?" when she remembered that she could not account to the old woman for knowing anything about her. So she only said, "I trust you will find her, and here is something to help you on your way," and put a denarius into her hand.

"Thank you, my dear young lady," said the old woman, "and may you eat bread in the Kingdom of God."

As Calpurnia went on towards home, she could not forget these words. Domitilla had spoken of the Kingdom of God. Was this old woman a Christian too?

Calpurnia was puzzling over this, and thinking of Aulus. She had got close to the door in the wall. She stood there, conjuring up a vision of Aulus coming along the path. He could not come that way —he would land at Puteoli, almost certainly, and Calpurnia was looking towards Alba and Rome. Suddenly she perceived a figure in the distance—a man. At that distance, it might as well be Aulus as another—she would make believe it *was* Aulus. It was a young man, and not a peasant, nor even a country gentleman, for he wore a toga, and the country gentlemen mostly took pride in going about in a tunic and girdle, in rustic fashion. It must be a

gentleman of the Court. Calpurnia went in quickly and stood behind the door. It was old—the upper hinge had given way, and it required force to open or shut it, and as it stood partly closed there was a great gap at the hinge. She would be able to see the stranger as he passed, herself unseen. She must see him, and assure herself that it was not Aulus, for there was something about the figure which had startled her; some reminiscence of Aulus as he was when he went away had mixed itself up with her idle fancies, until she could not trust her own eyes.

It seemed a long time before she heard the stranger's footsteps. The cicalas sang so shrill, and Calpurnia's heart beat so loud. It was very foolish to let a fancy take such hold of her! He must have passed. The crackle of a dry leaf made Calpurnia start so violently that the young man, who had just reached the garden-door, turned his face. He only saw a door, somewhat crazy on its hinges, looking as though it had been long unused, and the dark boughs of a walnut-tree hanging over a wall. He stopped a moment, and gazed very earnestly. He turned, and Calpurnia thought he was coming in, and almost fainted with excess of gladness and terror. But he only bowed his head and lifted his hands, like one in prayer, and stood thus a few moments, while it seemed to Cal-

purnia that the waters of the great Emissary of the Alban lake were roaring in her ears, and that the air was growing dark around her, while the young man's face became clearer and brighter, as though it had drawn to itself all the light of the sun.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SHADOW IN THE ROSE-GARDEN.

He was gone, and Calpurnia had sunk down under the walnut-tree, trembling and nearly fainting from the violence of emotions which she did not understand. She only knew that she had seen Aulus, or a *larva* in his likeness. No one else ever had that sunny brow and those clear eyes. There was such a look on the face of Apollo, as he stood in his Temple on Palatinus. Yet he was changed and strange—and yet, no, he was the same, and she would have known him anywhere, as she had known him here, on the Alban Mount. Two impulses had seized on her as she stood watching him—one, to rush out and fall upon his neck; the other, to turn and flee—anywhere—to the ends of the earth. She was so rent and shaken by love and shame—yet scarcely knowing that it was either love or shame—that it was long before any thought could shape itself in her mind, except

that thought of overmastering gladness that Aulus was come home.

At last she rose and stole away to her own chamber, her knees trembling under her. She started at every sound, but she met no one—only, as she passed through the tennis-court, her mother put her head out of the lattice of the turret which overlooked it, and called to her, "Calpurnia, it is too late for you to be out in the sun. Come in at once. You are pale."

In her own chamber—which was also in a turret—Calpurnia threw herself on the cushions in the window-seat, and gave herself up to living over again those five minutes during which she had watched for Aulus to pass the garden-door. The turret looked east, up the slopes of the hill. Immediately below was a part of the garden—a part little used, and now a wilderness of roses growing anyhow, some climbing the old pear-trees, some covering the wall of the turret, and looking in at the window. The ground was pink with their shed leaves, like an apple-orchard in spring. And beyond, olives and vine-terraces stretched away up to the brighter green of the pines. There seemed to be nothing in the world but light, and life, and warmth, and green things growing, nor anything to do but to lie still and drink in this flood of Mother Earth's quickening heat. Calpurnia's eyes ached with gazing on the sunny hillside; the

immeasurable spaciousness of the blue air seemed to be drawing all up into itself. A glittering green lizard peeped in on Calpurnia, and when she stirred was gone in a flash. Everything seemed to be resting and waiting.

Aulus was come back. Presently they would call her to greet him, or at least to tell her that he was come. There was a step on the stair. Calpurnia held her breath to listen. Cautiously the curtain over the doorway was pushed aside. Calpurnia, looking through her fingers, as her hand lay across her face to shield her eyes from the glare, saw her mother. Aemilia came in very softly, and Calpurnia would not move, lest she should seem to have been expecting something; she would wait, and let her mother come close and arouse her. But Aemilia only stood looking at her from the threshold, and before Calpurnia could make up her mind to seem to be awake, she had turned, and was gone.

Of course she had come to tell Calpurnia that Aulus was returned. Calpurnia was almost glad she had gone away—she was still so agitated that she could hardly have maintained a proper reserve.

At last Calpurnia took her embroidery, and going down, searched long before she found her mother sitting on a cool and shady terrace at the foot of a plane-tree.

"I am glad you have slept, Calpurnia. I hoped you would not awake so soon, but sleep on, and take your siesta," said Aemilia. "It was very imprudent to be out in the sun, even with a parasol; nothing is more likely to bring on a return of fever than exposure to the sun.

"I am well, mother," said Calpurnia, threading her needle. There was a silence, in which Calpurnia could hear the click of the needles.

"Where is my father?" she asked at last. "And where are Julius and Tertia?"

"Your father has not returned from Albanum. Do not you remember that he said he should most likely be several days at the Palace?"

Calpurnia had expected her mother to say, "Your father is with a friend who has returned from a long journey—guess, who can it be?" or something like that. This answer irritated her. Why would not her mother tell her?

"We have not seen Publius lately," she said, hoping that perhaps his name might provoke her mother to speak.

"He is gone to Praeneste. He said it was too hot here," replied Aemilia. "Surely, child, you don't regret him?"

"I? Oh, mother, you know I detest him!" cried Calpurnia. "Was he kind to his wife, mother? Why did she die?"

"I don't know; it was while we were in Britain," said Aemilia.

"How I should pity his wife, if she were alive!" said Calpurnia. "To be always sneered at! My father says he respects neither Gods nor men."

"You cannot think *I* love him, child," said Aemilia, "when I know what he tried to do to your father."

"What was it?" asked Calpurnia. "Grandmother often speaks of something he did, but she will not tell me."

"I do not know much about it myself," said Aemilia. "All I know is, that after Vespasian got the empire, Publius secretly accused your father of having tried to conspire with Helvidius, Fannia's husband. Your father was quite innocent; neither he nor Helvidius had conspired, though Helvidius had talked imprudently. But your father had been very intimate with Thrasea, and this was brought against him by Publius, especially when the conspiracy of Alienus was discovered. Publius tried to get your father accused of that conspiracy too, in which every one believed that Publius himself was concerned, but Vespasian never took any notice of his insinuations."

"Why was not Publius himself accused, mother?" asked Calpurnia.

"He was too clever," said Aemilia. "I cannot tell

you all. I only know what I was told, and your father himself never knew all. It was certain that either Publius or your father was involved, but Publius managed so cleverly that it was difficult to be quite sure which. No one believed a word against your father, and every one distrusted and hated Publius."

"I wish Publius was dead, mother," said Calpurnia.

But still Aemilia never uttered a word about Aulus. Half a dozen times while they sat on the terrace a servant came out to them—now with a message, now with a tray of biscuits, and dried raisins, and snow-cooled wine—and each time Calpurnia's heart came into her mouth. But it never was Aulus, nor anything about him. Tryphosa came, but not to ask which room should be prepared for him; and Tertia came, with Pasht and a great doll in her arms, and sat down at her mother's knee and prattled away, but never spoke of Aulus, so she at least could not have seen him. And so days went on.

* * * * * *

"Aulus will lose all the calm weather, if he waits much longer," said Calpurnia one morning, as she and Tertia sat under the plane-tree. "Oh that Pasht could speak!" Pasht, grown almost out of kitten-hood, sat on the stone balustrade in the full blaze of the sun, the pupils of her topaz eyes contracted to

two black lines. "Oh that you could speak, Pasht, and tell us all you hear and all you see!"

Pasht opened her inscrutable eyes a little, and majestically folded her magnificent tail closer round her fore-paws, as she sat there upright, like an Egyptian Deity receiving the homage of her worshippers.

"She has not seen much lately," said Tertia. "She sleeps on my bed. But the other night she must have opened the lattice with her paw, for I woke, and the window was open, and she was gone, but the place was warm where she had lain. And I think"—here Tertia lowered her voice, and her own eyes dilated—"that she is enchanted, for when I looked out of the window, I could not see her anywhere, though the moon was shining, but there was a shadow just passing under this tree—and I think it must have been Pasht. I was afraid of her at first, when she came back, but she purred and rubbed me, as if to say, 'I would not hurt you for the world, little Tertia.'"

Calpurnia was startled. A ghastly idea was taking hold of her that Aulus was dead, and she had seen his shade. This idea alternated with another—that perhaps Aulus wished to marry some one else, and therefore did not come. After all, they had never been betrothed. Of course, if he did not desire it,

she did not care a bit, and a revulsion of feeling came over her, in which she felt as cold as a stone. She buried her face in the cat's long, soft fur, and whispered, "Ah, Pasht, if you could only tell me what you see beyond the garden-wall!" Then she went into the house, and wandered from room to room, till she came to where Tryphosa was sorting the bath-towels and household linen. She was restless and irritable, and the unruffled expression of Tryphosa's countenance provoked her.

"How contented you look, Tryphosa!" she said. "One would think you had lately heard from Eudoxus."

Tryphosa suddenly flushed, then turned pale, and seemed to have been much disturbed by this harmless remark.

"It will be a long while, I fear, before I see him again," she said; "but he is with my young master, and we can always pray for those who are absent from us."

"I, too, pray for Caius," said Calpurnia, pushing her finger impatiently through a hole in one of the towels. "Diana is the protectress of maidens; but I fear to go to her temple by the lake. I could not go—I am afraid of the priest."

Calpurnia shuddered. The priest of Diana at Aricia was the famous "King of the Grove," a run-

away slave, who had obtained his priesthood by the murder of his predecessor—to be murdered in his turn by his successor.

"How can the Maiden Goddess endure such a priest?" said Calpurnia. "Oh, Tryphosa, is not this a very dull day? I would my father were returned from Albanum! I wonder whether Marcella is still at Praeneste! Tell me, Tryphosa, when did you last hear from——"

But at this instant Aemilia was heard calling Tryphosa, and she said, "Excuse——," and hurried away, leaving Calpurnia much perplexed at her constrained manner. She was as one who would speak, but may not.

It happened that night that Calpurnia could not sleep. She could not even lie still. There had been no rain for weeks, and many of the streams were dry. Calpurnia's limbs tingled with prickly heat, and she tossed on her couch until she could bear it no longer. These bed-chambers of the Villa were not like those in Rome, which mostly had no windows, and were only sleeping cupboards. These were large, and light, and airy, as befitted rooms intended for the hot weather. Calpurnia went to the window. Through the thin film of specular stone she could see the white flood of moonlight and the blurred outline of the trees. There were no malarious swamps very

near. Calpurnia ventured to undo the lattice, first wrapping herself in a mantle. Down below lay the deserted rose-garden, its alleys overgrown with briar. The sweet breath of the roses perfumed the night air. The full moon, like a dazzling silver shield, hung in the purple sky, and drowned the stars with her light. Calpurnia could see every leaf of the rose-bushes below. Suddenly—as it seemed with supernatural suddenness—she saw a dark figure, like a woman closely veiled, moving along one of the thorn-beset paths. She had but looked up at the moon for a moment, and lo! there was the shadow, out in the rose-garden, cautiously stepping over the thorns! Calpurnia's heart beat violently, and a cold chill of terror allayed her summer fever as effectually as sorrel could have done. It was but for an instant—for the winking of an eyelid—for almost in the same moment that Calpurnia first perceived the figure, a night-bird flew out of a tree with a sharp cry. Calpurnia started and drew back from the window. The figure started too, and looked up, and Calpurnia saw that it was Tryphosa.

In an instant, she had leaped to a conclusion and taken a resolution. Aulus at the garden-door—Tryphosa's constrained manner that day—Tryphosa was going to meet Aulus. Calpurnia knew how faithfully she could guard a secret—it would be of

no use to ask her questions—she must surprise her secret. She must follow Tryphosa, and see where she went; then, when Tryphosa found she knew so much, she would divulge the rest.

In a moment, Calpurnia had pulled on the leather shoes which she used on her rambles about the gardens and vineyards, felt her way down the staircase and along a passage, at the other end of which her father and mother slept, and found the door that led to the garden left ajar. It did not creak—the hinge had been oiled—and Calpurnia found herself out in the rose-garden, following after Tryphosa as quickly as she dared.

CHAPTER XX.

THE EMISSARIUM.

As Calpurnia expected, Tryphosa made for the door which opened on to the mountain-path. It creaked, and Tryphosa opened it only just wide enough for her to squeeze through. Calpurnia, breathless with the pursuit, waited a few seconds, lest Tryphosa should hear her, and turn. Then, fearing lest Tryphosa should plunge into the shadows of the olive-groves, she slipped out in her turn. Tryphosa was hurrying along in the direction of Bovillae. Calpurnia kept under the shadow of the trees—such shadow as there was, for the moon, shining along the path, illuminated it from side to side.

At last they were past the wall of the Villa grounds. Calpurnia distinctly heard the rumble of wheels on the high-road below—slow, heavy wheels, of some waggon, laden perhaps with blocks of marble for the Emperor, who was always building something. Tryphosa seemed to hear it too. She hurried on

faster, wrapping her mantle more closely over her head. The intense brightness of the moonlight showed every stone on the path, and all the distant landscape swam in a sea of mist. Calpurnia thought of her visit to Dama's Villa, and shivered in the warm summer night. But it gave her a little courage to see that Tryphosa was hurrying on so fast that it was unlikely she would look back. Calpurnia's mantle was a dark red, and looked black in the shadow of the trees. But the necessity of keeping under their shadow considerably hindered her, and she several times hurt her feet against the twisted roots.

She must have gone much more than a mile beyond the end of the wall, and could not now be far from Bovillae. Was Tryphosa going there? Calpurnia only knew the main street, through which passed the high-road. What if Tryphosa should go down into the network of narrow lanes which lay behind the chief street, and out of which Calpurnia had seen the filthy beggars swarm to beg from passing carriages? A little way on Calpurnia could now see a group of pine-trees, which she recognized. The earth had slipped, and the trees grew aslant, leaning far over the path. Just there, she knew that it turned down to join the high-road. But Tryphosa did not go down—on the contrary, she

struck up the hill by another path which led through the ilexes.

It was a very different matter to follow Tryphosa here. The interlacing ilex boughs made the path so dark, that Calpurnia would have turned back but for the hope of having Tryphosa's company for the return journey, if she ventured a little further. She had followed a sudden impulse, the irresistible promptings of her longing to learn the mystery of Aulus's appearance, which she had somehow taken for granted was connected with Tryphosa's night expedition. That Tryphosa had any evil object in view never so much as crossed Calpurnia's mind. Tryphosa had lived in the family from her birth; her mother had been Aemilia's nurse, and to suspect her of an intrigue would have been impossible, although, thanks to Marcella, Calpurnia was not absolutely ignorant of such matters. Calpurnia knew into what perplexity Aulus's reported adoption of Christianity had thrown her father. Aulus might not dare to present himself at the Villa.

Tryphosa was now, as it seemed, making straight for the Palace. Presently the path ascended, and when Calpurnia, who kept as near to Tryphosa as she dared—nearer now that the shady ilexes concealed her—gained the ridge, she saw, lying a little below her, the waters of the Alban Lake gleaming silver in

the moon. Across the lake, the steep woody slope of the Alban Mount rose up two thousand feet from the water-side, and on the topmost peak the columns of Latian Jove stood out white and ghastly against the purple sky. But Calpurnia had no time to mark the tender beauty of the lake, lapped in the chestnut and ilex-covered hills; she was afraid of losing sight of the figure which moved so swiftly among the tree-trunks. Calpurnia hurried on, all thought of going back alone abandoned, now that she knew how far she had come. Long before this she had expected to see another shrouded figure glide out of the shadows. Then she would have withdrawn into the darkness of the olives, and perhaps have gone back to the safe shelter of the garden-walls, and there waited for Tryphosa, who then must tell her secret. But now retreat seemed worse than advance, so she hurried on over the rough ground, seeing between the trees the misty slope of the Latian Mount and the shining lake, with many a marble-columned villa mirrored in those mysterious and unfathomed waters. Had not Tryphosa's head been so closely muffled in her cloak, she must have heard Calpurnia's steps on the dry leaves, for Calpurnia was growing less afraid of being seen by Tryphosa than of losing sight of her. Suddenly she struck her foot against a stump, and fell. She had hurt her foot very much, and for a moment

could not put it to the ground. She saw that Tryphosa had heard the sound of her fall; she was running. "Tryphosa! it is I! Stop, Tryphosa!" she called; but her throat was dry with the long, hurried walk and with fear, and her voice was hoarse. "Tryphosa! Tryphosa!" she cried again, her voice growing clearer with use. She was hurrying on now; but she could not go as fast as before, her ankle nearly gave way at every step, and she was out of breath. She saw Tryphosa distancing her—a flying shadow far in front, now lost amongst the trees. The ground dipped down and rose again, and before Calpurnia was aware, she had lost sight of Tryphosa. In vain she painfully climbed the rising ground, and called Tryphosa in low, frightened tones; they echoed hollow among the ilexes, but there was no answer, and Calpurnia found herself alone on the verge of the Alban Lake just as the moon paled in the first cold greyness of daybreak.

More than once it had seemed to Tryphosa that she had heard a footstep behind her, and more than once she had turned her head to see if she were followed. But the shadows fell across the path in such a maze of interlacings, and—as she knew by former experiences—could so cunningly steal a human shape, that each time she hurried on reassured. Even when Calpurnia fell, she had been so hidden by the inequalities of the

ground that Tryphosa did not feel quite certain her fears had not magnified the sudden rush of some nocturnal animal, disturbed by her approach, into the leap of a man from the thicket of the trees. But she was excessively scared. On that night of all others she was apprehensive of discovery, and she fled as though the wings of Mercury were on her feet for the brief space which lay between her and her refuge.

A dense undergrowth masked a slight rise. Tryphosa plunged into this covert, and presently found herself stopped by a clump of bushes growing on the slope. But she knew the ground, and carefully putting aside the branches, found a comparatively open space, close to the slope, which just there fell in, in a hollow like the entrance to a cave. The thick brushwood and the branches of a wild olive which overhung this hollow cast so black a shade that a person unaccustomed to the place would never have suspected the hand of man, much less have noticed a low door. Tryphosa, first cautiously listening to make sure that she had escaped her pursuer—if such he were—went into the darkness of the hollow, and tapped very softly at the door, which was immediately opened a little from within. Tryphosa whispered something, and was admitted. A faint light shone down the narrow passage into which the door opened, and the sound of

trickling water could be distinctly heard. The door was, in fact, one of the entrances to the famous *Emissarium* of the Alban Lake, which the Delphic Oracle bade Camillus make, when Veii had been besieged seven years. Besides the doorkeeper, a person stood at the end of the passage, on passing whom Tryphosa threw back her mantle, that he might see her face. The passage led into a square chamber, walled with blocks of peperino. The chamber was dimly lighted by lamps fixed in the wall, and was full of people, both men and women, the women standing apart from the men. All were wrapped closely in mantles. Some of them were sitting on the stone benches which ran round the walls. Among these were Flavius Clemens and Domitilla. At the farther end, behind a small table, on which stood a golden plate and cup, sat a venerable and majestic old man, with white hair and flowing beard. It was Anacletus, the Bishop, and near him, at the side of the table, sat the Presbyter Nicodemus.

Tryphosa, as the latest comer, stood behind. She knew, by sight at least, almost every one present. There were the Senator Pudens and his wife, the blue-eyed Claudia Rufina, her northern beauty shining with a kind of angelic glory in the humble light of a lamp whose rays happened to fall full upon her. But Tryphosa's eyes did not rest long upon Claudia;

some slight stir among the men caused her to look that way. A tall man had just come in, and as he flung back the folds of the dark cloak in which he was muffled, Tryphosa saw the thick close-curling locks and the open brow of Aulus Atticus. At sight of him, her knees smote together with agitation, and she leaned on the woman next her, while she eagerly scanned the faces of the men to find Eudoxus.

"Are you ill?" whispered the woman. Tryphosa knew that she was one of Domitilla's tirewomen.

"No," replied Tryphosa; "but I see some one here who comes from my husband."

As Tryphosa had not been let into the secret of the recall of Aulus, she naturally concluded that Eudoxus must be with him. Eudoxus, though he had never been able to make up his mind to join the Christians, yet was much attracted towards them, and had not opposed his wife's conversion. He had even occasionally been present at that part of the Christian worship to which an unbeliever could be admitted. Tryphosa did know that Aulus had become a Christian, and, seeing him here, a wild hope sprang up in her heart that perhaps Eudoxus too had been called to eternal life in that Kingdom of God which to the first believers was so living a reality. But Eudoxus was not there, and Tryphosa tried to compose her thoughts for the solemn service of prayer and thanksgiving

which was about to begin. She always at such times commended her husband to the mercy of God, and to-day she prayed for him more fervently than ever.

The moment before the service began, some one touched her shoulder. It was Aulus. "You are Tryphosa?" he said. "I must speak with you."

Aulus returned to his place, leaving Tryphosa tossed with hope and fear. Hope predominated—Eudoxus must have returned with Aulus and Caius—for Tryphosa did not doubt that Caius too had returned. Perhaps he was now arriving at the Villa—she might be missed, and then what could she say? A chill came over her in the midst of her glad expectation of seeing her husband so soon. A sense of the danger in which Aulus stood—for Tryphosa knew of the suit of Crassus—struck her with a sudden dread. She listened; but all she heard was the trickling of the unseen waters of the Alban Lake, escaping by their secret channel into the heart of the mountains. She thought of that River of Death of which heathen legend told, and shuddered. Were the lives of Piso, and Aemilia, and Calpurnia flowing away to darkness, like the cold river beneath? She had heard Piso say but the day before, "I hear the rolling of Styx in my ears," and a cold shiver ran through her.

CHAPTER XXI.

A CHRISTIAN ASSEMBLY.

But at that moment the assembly rose, and the voice of the Bishop began to recite the Morning Psalm.

"O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee; my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee, in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; to see Thy Power and Thy Glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. Because Thy loving-kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee."

The other voices took up the words, in alternate verses, and then the Presbyter, while all the people still stood, read the Parables of the Sower and of the Tares. Then all sat down, while Anacletus, sitting also, addressed them—prefacing his discourse with, "Peace be unto you." To which all replied, "Peace to thee also."

The Bishop's discourse was brief. He reminded his hearers that God had called them out of darkness

into His marvellous light. "Christ is risen," said the preacher. "Let us too rise with Him to holiness, without which no man shall see God. Be holy, for He is holy who redeemed you. Fear not, though the waters roar and are troubled. The Lord warned us that in the world we shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, brethren, for He has overcome the world. The time is short; the day of the Lord is at hand. Therefore, be sober, and watch, for the Lord shall come in an hour when we think not. Let us so walk, that we may see Him with joy and not with shame. For the fashion of this world passeth away, and all the glory of it, and though men say, 'Where is the promise of His coming'—seeing that all things continue as they were from the beginning—yet shall He come as a thief in the night. And the heavens and earth shall be dissolved; as in the day when the city of Pompeii and all the cities of Stabia were destroyed, so shall it be in the end of the world. Wherefore, my brethren, live as they that are to die to-morrow—be sober, and watch. Blessed is he that endureth and fainteth not, but waiteth patiently for God. And as the blessed Paul said, 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Not persecution, nor peril, nor sword.' For to live is Christ, and to die is gain. And as Christ lived among us as a servant, working with His own hands, so let us do whatsoever our hand findeth

to do, not being idle or disorderly, but with well-doing putting our enemies to silence. For this is thankworthy, to endure grief, suffering wrongfully. Wherefore let us commit our souls to God, and fear not what man can do unto us, but let us fear only lest, a promise being left us of entering into His rest, any of us should seem to come short of it. And above all, put on love, which, saith the Apostle, is the bond of perfectness; and again, 'Owe no man anything, but to love one another.' And again, 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such is no law.' Let us, then, rejoice in tribulations, and be steadfast and immovable, always remembering the words of the Lord JESUS, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age.' Amen."

The Bishop ceased, and all rising, an old man in the congregation repeated the Lord's Prayer. Other prayers followed—for catechumens, for the whole Church, for the peace of the world, for a blessing on that day, and on all days of their lives—above all, that that day and all days of their pilgrimage might be passed without sin, and that God would send the Angel of Peace, and give them a blessed end. Then the Bishop said, "Let us commend ourselves and one another to the living God by His only begotten Son."

After this, such of the congregation as were catechumens went away, and the rest of the faithful presenting their oblations of bread and wine, a portion was set aside for the poor and for the love-feasts, and when the Bishop had said, "The Peace of God be with you," the men and the women gave each other the kiss of peace, and the deacon cried aloud, "Let none that is at enmity with his neighbour and no hypocrite draw near. Let us stand before the Lord with fear, to offer our sacrifice."

Then the Bishop offered up the bread and the wine, under the name of *Eucharist*, or Thanksgiving. All the people said "*Amen*," and then, coming forward in their order, received the Sacrament from the hands of Anacletus and Nicodemus, some standing, some kneeling, some prostrating themselves, the ministrant saying to each, as he gave the bread or the wine, "The Body of Christ!" "The Blood of Christ!" To which each replied devoutly, "*Amen!*"

When all had partaken, the Bishop again gave thanks, and the whole assembly sang the Trisagion—"Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord of Hosts; heaven and earth are full of Thy Glory; blessed be Thou throughout the ages."

The voices swelled out in a wave of triumphant sound, which beat high against the arch of the roof, and then died away down the passages of the

Emissarium, as the sound of breaking billows dies along the rock-bound coast.

When Anacletus had said, "Go in peace," Tryphosa, sick with suspense, sought for Aulus. He was known to very few there—only Flavius Clemens and Domitilla—his greetings were soon said, and he came to where Tryphosa waited for him under the olive-trees in the cold grey dawn.

"Let us speak without," he whispered, and led the way.

As soon as they had gone into the wood as far as a man might sling a stone, Tryphosa exclaimed, "For pity, Sir, tell me where is my husband Eudoxus."

"He is at Athens, with Caius," replied Aulus—on hearing which, Tryphosa sat down on a fallen tree, and wept bitterly. "He is well—of a truth, he is well," said Aulus, wishing to comfort her.

"I thought he was surely come back with you!" sobbed Tryphosa.

"Only I am come," replied Aulus—and Tryphosa, even amidst her tears, observed his sorrowful tone, and looked up at him inquiringly. "I am not permitted to come to the Villa," continued Aulus. "My beloved father, Piso, whom I must ever revere, has forbidden me. But I may ask you of the welfare of those who are so unspeakably dear to me. How is

Aemilia? Is she also angry with me? And Calpurnia—has she forgotten me?"

"She has not forgotten you—it might be better for her if she had," replied Tryphosa—her woman's interest in a lover somewhat overcoming her discretion.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Aulus, eagerly.

"Why, Sir, you know how hard your being a Christian will make it," faltered Tryphosa. "And then there is Publius Calpurnius Crassus, my Master's cousin—but as unlike him as light is to darkness—he wants to marry her—or so it is said in the house. I ought not to have said it—— "

"I knew it already," said Aulus, quietly. "But tell me, does Calpurnia remember me?"

"Remember you! So quietly as she has lived, what else had she to remember?" said Tryphosa, endeavouring too late to be discreet.

"Does she ever talk of me? Oh, dear Tryphosa, do not be afraid to answer me," cried Aulus, unable to conceal his impatience. "Does *she* consent to be the wife of Crassus?"

"She abhors him—she cannot bear the sight of him," said Tryphosa, glancing round her in terror as she spoke—but only the olive-trees heard her. "I ought not to tell you this, and yet every one knows it. He will destroy my dear Master yet—and you too. Alas! I see ruin staring us all in the face!"

"'Fear not what man can do unto thee,'" said Aulus; but his clear eyes were a little troubled.

The ground was wet with dew—dew-drops lay cold on every leaf of the olives, and every creeping spray of smilax, and on the glossy myrtle-bushes. A thick mist was rising from the lake, blotting out the Alban Mount, and in the west, the moon was only a blurred and distorted patch of pallid silver, gleaming sickly through the close-woven veil. The olives, too, looked wan and grey, and all nature seemed to have turned pale.

"We shall get a fever," said Tryphosa, rising. "And day is breaking. I must go."

"I may come with you to the door in the wall," said Aulus, as they hurried along. "A week ago, Tryphosa—the day after Piso came to me at Albanum—I passed it, and I thought I saw Calpurnia. It was but for an instant. She stood under a great tree. I took her for a spirit, she was so pale; but how beautiful she has grown! Tryphosa, does she know anything of the things of God?"

"She has heard that you are a Christian," replied Tryphosa. "But though Piso and Aemilia trust me much, they have said but little to me respecting you. We live surrounded by spies even here. I scarcely feel safe. We are so near——" She dropped her voice to a whisper, and made a motion with her thumb in the direction of Domitian's Villa. "Piso stands in

a slippery path. His name, his wealth, his reputation, are all so many dangers—— "

"Alas! I know it but too well," said Aulus. "But tell me of Calpurnia. When she heard I was a Christian, what effect did the news produce on her? Did she dismiss me from her thoughts?"

"Nay; truly I believe that she thought about you more often than ever," said Tryphosa. "But, oh, if you knew the dangers which surround us! If you heard what I hear! When we left Rome, they were betting at the wine-shops on Piso and Crassus—whether Crassus would betray Piso, or make him Emperor! Perhaps Domitian's spies set them on. These are evil days."

Tryphosa said all this in low, cautious tones, now stopping to whisper a few words too dangerous to be trusted above one's breath, now again hurrying on, while the grey veil slowly grew thinner, and a rosy light crept trembling into the upper air.

"It may be that the days of Nero will return, and we must bear witness with our blood," said Aulus. "Be it as God wills! In life or in death we are His. Domitian himself is His minister, to bring us the more quickly to glory."

"Calpurnia beheld Aristarchus die in the Flavian Amphitheatre for the witness of Jesus Christ," said Tryphosa.

"The news of his death reached us in Athens," said Aulus. "And these are the sights they show to women and tender maidens! Truly the mercies of the wicked are cruel!"

"The Roman women love to look on blood," said Tryphosa. "You have never seen a Show, and heard the people yell with delight when a man's bowels gush out. These Italians are half barbarian."

"Ah! Tryphosa, neither you nor Eudoxus can ever forget you are Greeks," said Aulus. "But here is the door. I go. Farewell, and the Lord be with you."

Aulus hastened back, lest he should be seen by any of the rustic slaves early afield, and Tryphosa, stealing through the garden, was just under Calpurnia's window, when a twig fell at her feet. She looked up, and saw Calpurnia looking out, her face very pale and her eyes heavy. Superstition lingers long. Calpurnia's aspect smote upon Tryphosa's heart as an ill omen.

Calpurnia slightly leaned from the window, and made a gesture with her hand—an imperious gesture, strange to the gentle Calpurnia.

"Tryphosa," said Calpurnia, when in obedience to that summons Tryphosa came up the stair of the tower, and entered her chamber, "Tryphosa, I saw you go out to-night, and I followed you as far as the Alban Lake. The ground was rough; I fell, and lost

you. Where did you go? Whom did you go to see? I am resolved to know!"

"Oh, my dear young lady!" said Tryphosa, in great agitation at these words, "I did not go for the purpose you imagine."

"What purpose do you think I imagine?" said Calpurnia, sternly. "You think I am a child, to be kept in the dark! You know very well that you went out to see *some one*, and I will know who it was, and what errand you had to him!"

So far, Calpurnia had spoken in the stern tones of a daughter of Africanus, but her mother's gentler nature quickly prevailed in her, and, bursting into unheroic tears, she exclaimed, "Oh, Tryphosa, how unkind are you thus to keep me on the rack! Tell me, I beseech you, where you went? I *must* know—it concerns me."

"Nay; the purpose with which I went out does not concern you," said Tryphosa; "that is, not in any especial manner."

"You are a bad dissembler, Tryphosa," said Calpurnia, her clear, innocent eyes fixed steadily on Tryphosa. "You cannot deceive me. I know wherefore you went."

Tryphosa grew deadly pale. "If you know," she said, in an altered voice, "at least tell me how you know it."

"I had no need to be told," said Calpurnia. "You think I am still a foolish child, understanding nothing of what goes on around me. When I see *you*—you, whom we all trust as we do ourselves, stealing forth by night towards the town, I know you did not go to meet a lover, but I know some powerful motive drew you. Tell me, Tryphosa, where you went. Tell me, Tryphosa. I swear by the Gods never to reveal it."

Tryphosa stood silent. The tears were rolling down her cheeks. She knew not what to say. Calpurnia evidently did not know all—did not know of the hidden entrance to the Emissarium. Tryphosa feared to speak, yet was greatly distressed at being forced to reject Calpurnia's pleading.

"Will you not tell me, Tryphosa, when I ask it as a kindness?" said Calpurnia, with anger and impatience in her voice. "Must I speak more plainly? Must I tell you that you went to speak with Aulus Atticus, who is come from Athens——"

"How do you know he is come?" asked Tryphosa.

"I saw him with these eyes," replied Calpurnia. "Did my father bid you keep it from me?"

"No; I myself did not know it until I saw him," said Tryphosa.

"Have you seen him this night?"

"Yes," faltered Tryphosa, thus driven to bay.

"Was Eudoxus with him?"

"Alas!" said Tryphosa, bursting into tears again, "Eudoxus is not returned; he is to remain in Athens with your brother Caius."

"Eudoxus not returned? And you did not know of Aulus's return till you saw him?" said Calpurnia. "What mystery is this, Tryphosa? And who are they whose lives you might imperil by telling me the truth? By the Immortal Gods, Tryphosa, I conjure you to tell me what this means!"

"They are not conspirators," replied Tryphosa, earnestly. "I declare, by the Truth itself, that they are innocent and harmless, and design no ill to any creature."

Calpurnia started. Tryphosa's words recalled what Domitilla had said of the Christians.

"Tryphosa!" she exclaimed, "I guess your secret." And the two looked at each other in silence.

CHAPTER XXII.

AULUS ATTICUS.

Piso had arranged to meet his ward at an inn just outside the Capene Gate. He wished for Calpurnia's sake to know exactly how the case stood before he received Aulus as his guest. He had chosen a noisy rendezvous. Waggons, carts, and vehicles of all descriptions stood outside—some unhorsed, some merely waiting while the driver tossed down a draught of wine, cooled with the cold Marcian water. The innkeeper, in a dirty brown tunic, sat at his door, enjoying the morning sun, beside his fat, slovenly wife, who, with oil-jar and feather, was oiling her daughter's jetty locks preparatory to twisting them up in plaits too elaborate to be undone oftener than once a month at most. The good woman occasionally intermitted these operations to search for and capture some of those persecuted insects which an artificial civilization has brought into odium. The lady's operations gave a fair warning of what might be

expected within. On the doorpost hung a big-bellied jar, protected by a wicker case, containing a drink compounded of oil, vinegar, and water, flavoured with onions, garlic, cucumbers, and red peppers. This was the famous *posca*, dear to thirsty soldiers.

The ground-floor of the inn—partly open to the roof—was about equally divided between stable and kitchen, and the stamping of horses and the clink of chains as they shook their heads over the manger mingled with the sound of loud talking and the clatter of dishes, while pigs and fowls ran about among the guests. A garlic-laden steam rose from the kitchen fire, where a half-naked cook was preparing a stew. But most of the guests were content with a slice of black bread and an onion, with, perhaps, a piece of Toulouse cheese.

"You have a gentleman here from Campania," said Piso, when the innkeeper, discerning a guest of superior condition, rose, and came forward, asking what his illustrious lordship might please to want.

"He is lodged upstairs," replied the innkeeper, and led the way indoors. The stench and filth were indescribable, and the usual noises of the place were reinforced at the moment by the dying squalls of a fowl whose neck was just being wrung for Aulus's dinner. A broad but tumbledown stair opposite to the

door led to the upper rooms—mere cells, arranged on each side of a narrow corridor, the inner row looking into the common room.

"Here is a noble gentleman come to visit you, Sir," cried the innkeeper, knocking at the rough wooden door of one of these guest-chambers.

Piso, entering, found himself embraced by Aulus, and returning Aulus's embrace before he remembered that he had intended to show some reserve at first, and even to feign coldness until he could sound Aulus a little, and ascertain how much truth there was in Crassus's story.

Aulus had been writing. A roll of parchment and an ink-bottle were on the stone table—which, with a stone bench, formed all the furniture of the room.

"I was writing to you," he said, when the emotions of this meeting allowed him to speak. Piso, too, was much moved.

"You look well. You are grown a fine young man. I could be proud of you," he said, looking at Aulus with a pleasure he found it impossible to dissemble. "And you are the very image of your father at your age. *Fugaces labuntur anni*—you make an old man of me, Aulus."

"Do not speak so, dear father. I trust half your life lies still before you," said Aulus.

"Is life, then, according to your new opinions, so

well worth keeping?" asked Piso, coming thus suddenly to the point.

"Life is good, so long as God gives it," replied Aulus. He was embarrassed; respect and affection for his adopted father made an explanation seem difficult, especially as he instinctively felt that all explanation must be vain. "I should like, before we speak of that matter," he said, with an effort, "to ask of my mother, of Calpurnia, and Julius."

"They are all well," said Piso, rather coldly. "My wife"—he did not say "your mother," in the old fashion—"bade me carry you her love." Then he lowered his voice, and added, "Before we can speak of Calpurnia, I must know precisely what has happened, and what I am to expect from you. My cousin, Publius Crassus, who, it seems, saw you in Teios, told me you had turned Christian. Is it true?"

"It is true," replied Aulus. He flinched under Piso's searching gaze, but only with the involuntary flinching of a man at whose face a sudden blow is aimed. "It is true," he repeated. And then, with a young man's impatience to defend himself, he added hastily, "I claim the same right to believe in my God which every man takes in these days to disbelieve in the Gods of his fathers."

"I did not reproach you, Aulus," said Piso, quietly. He paused. It was difficult to decide on his argu-

ment, and it was with a sense that he was doing something unworthy that he fell back on motives of prudence. "Have you counted the cost of this vagary?" he said.

"Father!" exclaimed Aulus, crimsoning with indignation and surprise. "Do I hear *you* counselling me to dissemble my opinions for fear of the consequences?"

"To some extent—and where proclaiming them could do no good to any, but harm to many," replied Piso, "a man is justified in holding his peace."

"Alas! where is that noble independence you used to praise?" said Aulus, hot tears standing in his eyes. "Have I not—a thousand times—heard you praise Thrasea?"

"It is impossible to me, Aulus, to put these opinions of yours upon the same level as those of Thrasea."

"Then may a man lie about his opinions, if only those opinions be less sublime than the opinions of Thrasea?" asked Aulus. He spoke with great respect, but also with great firmness. His courage had returned.

"You are destroying yourself, Aulus. Your very citizenship would not protect you from dying the death of a criminal. There was an old man—a Greek—who was exposed at Stella's Shows. They said he had the citizenship——"

"Have I not learned from the Stoics—nay, from your own favourite Lucretius, Epicurean as he was—that the fear of death is itself the chief evil?" said Aulus. "Does not Lucretius say that it makes men wicked? I thought, my dearest father, that you might perhaps believe the lying tales which are told of us, and that you would certainly reproach me for forsaking the Gods of Rome; but I never thought you would urge fear upon me——"

"Why should you cast your life away?" said Piso. He laid a very slight stress on the word *your*. Then, as though Aulus's example had stung him into laying aside his reserve, he added, "Have not I been silent? I have never advocated a useless sacrifice. You, perhaps, despise me on that account; but what would my death have profited the State? If I might die fighting the enemies of Rome, how gladly would I lay down my life! Would indeed that I had fallen beside your father at the Grampian Mountain!"

Piso rose abruptly, and turned to the little window, whence he could look down on the inn-yard. A woman was looking up; but Piso's eyes were so dim with unwonted tears, that he did not notice her for several minutes. Then it struck him that she was watching the window, and the idea recalled him to his usual alertness of mind. A thin, dark woman, young and handsome, but worn, and too eager. She drew

back suddenly, just as Piso's attention was drawn to her.

"I think we are watched," said Piso, in a low voice. "I see a woman I have often seen before in the Grotto at Pausilypum—a coral-seller and fortune-teller—and, as I suspect, a spy of Crassus's."

"Father," said Aulus, laying his hand on Piso's arm, "let me not bring danger on you—let me return to Athens——"

"It would seem suspicious," said Piso. "All I do is watched—and Domitian is not my worst enemy. Ah, my Aulus, but for this madness of yours, you might have saved me—have saved Calpurnia! But now, you can but increase my peril."

"What do you mean?" asked Aulus, his bright young face suddenly changing. He looked like his father, as Piso saw him last, dragged out dead from under the British chariot-wheels, with pale, distorted face.

"You know," said Piso, trying to put aside these thoughts, "that the obstinate refusal of the Christians to perform the most harmless and common acts—mere forms, which every one else, whatever his private opinions, does as a matter of course—renders it impossible for them to take their places even as citizens. With these absurd scruples, you could scarcely marry Calpurnia; there are sacrifices which your wife, at

least, would be expected to perform. Your opinions would be discovered, and Crassus would use the opportunity to denounce me for refusing my daughter to him, that I might give her to a Christian. I shall be accused of atheism."

"But you will surely never give her to *him!*" said Aulus, in such undisguised consternation, that Piso relented in spite of himself.

"See the dilemma in which you place me," he said. "If I refuse her to him, except on the ground of a pre-contract, I must come to an open rupture with him. Yet if I give her to you, ruin stares me in the face if this infatuation of yours is discovered. What can there be, Aulus, in this fantastic new religion which could make up to you for the loss of Calpurnia, the very mention of which seems to overwhelm you?"

"I love her, for your sake as well as her own!" said Aulus. "My life is bound up with you and yours—you tear my heart out when you speak of breaking that tie. It is this by which God tries me. I could endure the rest—give up fame and riches, and life itself, for Him who redeemed me; but Calpurnia——" Aulus covered his face with his hands, and two or three great sobs burst from him.

"Hush!" said Piso, looking uneasily toward the door. "For myself," he continued presently, "I regard all these opinions with indifference—while

regretting you should have chosen to ally yourself with a band of illiterate fanatics, who seem to me to be little more respectable than the Priests of Cybele. But I would give Calpurnia to you, to preserve her from him—that is, supposing your sect would permit the marriage——" There was a grim irony in Piso's tone as he said it.

"I loved her before I was a Christian—I cannot cease to love her now," said Aulus. "I always considered myself bound to you and to her, though no betrothal passed between us. But, O my dearest father, dismiss from your mind these unworthy comparisons! Christians are above all things afraid to offend against the just and holy law of God. Their morals—did you know what is really taught among them—far more nearly resemble those of the Stoics. We too believe that the greatest evil is to be the slave of lust, of avarice, of any sin, and the greatest good to lie in the following of justice. We too think that it is better to die than to sin, and that it is what he is, and not what he has, that makes a man happy. Do not the Stoics say that a man's life is ordered for him by the Gods, and that even his misfortunes may be intended for his good? So say we too."

"It is an extraordinary mixture, I allow," said Piso. "I have heard a great deal about it of late, and it appears to me to be a singular mixture of

childish credulity and lofty sentiment. But its appeal to the very scum of the earth must be fatal to it. The vulgar herd may receive it; but they will lower it to their own level, until the philosophical portion of it utterly disappears, and only the vulgar superstition remains. As for its influencing society, the very idea is absurd. Why, even the Academy and the Stoics cannot be said to have influenced society to any appreciable extent. These doctrines are a learned pastime for the thoughtful—they do not affect society as a whole. How much less then can the Christian doctrines ever do so! The only system of philosophy which has ever done it is that of Epicurus——"

"And Epicurus, too, appealed to the illiterate," said Aulus.

"He did," returned Piso; "and therefore I distrust him. I distrust a man who tells the common herd that they are as well able to comprehend him as those who have spent their days in the study of philosophy."

"Study does not always make a man wise, dear father," said Aulus.

"Nothing will make a fool wise," replied Piso. "But no wise man refuses therefore to study, nor will he put faith in any philosophy which disparages study. The philosophy of Epicurus has spread,

because it is in truth no philosophy at all, but a mere appeal to our most vulgar tastes and desires. The Christian doctrines—so far as I can understand them —differ only in this—that they appeal to our most vulgar fears and miseries. An excellent religion, I grant you, Aulus, for slaves, for the miserable, the oppressed—in short, for the scum of the earth. But that a Roman gentleman should abase himself to receive it passes my comprehension!"

"Is a Roman lifted so high above calamity, father?" said Aulus. "He is not, it is true, subject to the lash, or the brand, or the collar; but the whips of the Furies, the shears of the Fates, come alike to Caesar and to the meanest of his slaves. And if we escape all other calamities, yet old age and death must at last overtake us all. Is there one of us, my father, who can say that he has no need of consolation?"

"It is the part of the brave man to endure unequal fortune with an equal mind," said Piso. "But this discussion is as useless as one between a Stoic and an Epicurean. Sometimes they use the same words with different meanings; sometimes they use different meanings, but the same words. But at bottom they are irreconcilably at variance, because their desires differ—and man differs from man chiefly in respect of that which he desires. The Christians appear to me

to have borrowed from both Stoics and Epicureans, but I confess I can give them little credit for their philosophy. Especially their doctrine of the resurrection of the dead offends my reason. If they hoped for it—if they, like Cicero, reasoned on its probability—I could go with them; but they assert it as a fact, and offer in proof a story wilder than that of Hercules and Theseus. Let us talk of it no more. You know that I have loved you as a son. Show me that this folly of yours leaves you still not unworthy of that love, and I will not withdraw it from you on account of the extravagant enthusiasm which has possessed you. Of all follies, the follies of punishing men for their thoughts is the greatest—designs and actions alone are fit objects for punishment. And now that we understand one another, you must come with me to Aricia—for a short time at least. It may be better that you should not remain too long, for to such abasement are we come"—he said it bitterly—"that I cast about how not to offend Publius Crassus!"

Piso took Aulus to the Villa in his own chariot, drawing the curtains close to avoid observation. Theophila, if it was she, was nowhere to be seen. Aulus—his head full of the vision of Calpurnia as he had seen her, a fair, white-robed maiden, wrapped in a golden light—tried to give his attention to Piso, who was explaining the manner in which he had

administered his ward's modest fortune. At last, Piso, perceiving his preoccupation, ceased to speak of business, and gradually relapsing into his own anxious thoughts, left Aulus to his. The rest of the journey passed like a dream—a dream of delight, in which the figure of Calpurnia always stood out as it were transfigured in sunshine, yet with a chill sense of unseen calamity lurking behind the joy.

CHAPTER XXIII.

PASHT.

While Piso and Aulus sat talking in the inn, a great calamity befell little Tertia. As she was sitting very still on the terrace, reading the *Fables of Babrius* (in the Latin), with Pasht stretched out in the sun a little way off, a kite swooped down out of the blue sky. Tertia heard a rush of wings and one piteous cry, and looking up in terror, saw a great bird with flapping wings flying off with Pasht in his claws. Tertia shrieked, and clapped her hands, and ran towards him in a frenzy of terror, and the kite, encumbered by a heavier weight than he had expected, and scared by Tertia's cries, let poor Pasht fall, and flew away. The household, running out to see what was the matter, found Tertia, almost convulsed with grief, kneeling beside the dying Pasht. The kite had buried his cruel claws in her soft side, the blood was trickling over the marble pavement, and the fall had beaten the breath out of her. She gave one shudder after

she fell, and then lay still, the speculation gone out of her inscrutable eyes, and her long silky fur, which had bristled with fright, all tumbled and disordered. Aemilia was afraid that Tertia would hurt herself by the violence of her grief. She tried to take her in her arms, but Tertia flung herself down in the broiling sun, beside her dead pet, and refused all comfort.

It was just at this instant that Piso and Aulus arrived, and found Aemilia trying to lift up Tertia, who resisted, and abandoned herself to a fresh burst of sobs, while Calpurnia, weeping herself, entreated her sister to get up, and not lie there in the sun. They were all so absorbed, that they did not hear Piso and Aulus approaching.

"What is the matter?" said Piso.

"A kite has killed Pasht," said Aemilia. Then she saw Aulus, and exclaiming joyfully, "At last, my dear son!" ran and embraced him; while Calpurnia felt the air grow dark, turned sick and giddy, and would have fallen, if her father had not caught her.

The few days of Aulus's visit seemed to Calpurnia to pass as a dream. Faithful to his promise, Aulus avoided all private conversation with her, and always talked to Piso, or to Aemila, or to Julius—never to her. But there were many hours when he was alone with her mother and herself—when Aemilia would

ask him of Caius, and of Athens, and of their life there, and their travels, and of the voyages they had made. And Calpurnia, sitting behind her embroidery-frame, would listen, stealing a glance at Aulus now and then, drinking in his words and the tones of his voice, and wishing that these hours might last for ever; she seemed to be diligently plying her needle, but set many a stitch awry. As for Aulus, his veneration for Piso and his filial affection for Aemilia had long ago made him look on an alliance with them as the greatest piece of good fortune which could possibly befall him. When he left Baiae for Athens, Calpurnia was a lovely child, with the first promise of womanhood just beginning to reveal itself in a delicious shyness and reserve. Often during the years of absence he had pleased himself by speculating on the changes he would find in her on his return. He had always thought she would be grown a pretty maiden, though perhaps hardly so beautiful as Aemilia—his boyish ideal of womanly perfection. But that one glimpse of her as he passed by the garden-door had completely conquered him. To him she seemed scarcely a mortal maid, but rather one of those angels who watch over the saints of God. True, she was not yet a Christian, but she would certainly become one. The purity of the Gospel would instantly commend it to the innate purity of her soul. Oh,

that he might be the first to unfold these heavenly truths to her! If she was thus admirable while a worshipper of false gods, what would she not be if the eyes of her understanding were opened? It could not be that she would be permitted to fall a prey to Crassus.

"No; it is impossible!" he burst out, forgetting that he was not alone.

"What is impossible, Aulus?" asked Aemilia, who had been telling him of the illness of her aunt, the Vestal Junia.

"Pardon me, I was thinking of something—something I may not speak of—now," said Aulus, blushing furiously, and glancing towards Calpurnia's embroidery-frame.

Calpurnia had raised her own eyes. For a moment she and Aulus looked straight at each other, and all Piso's precautions were in the same moment rendered vain. Each read the other's secret, and each knew that the other had read it. Calpurnia shrank back behind the frame—she thought she was blushing; but she had turned pale, as pale as her white dress. A mist rose before her eyes. She knew that Aulus had sprung up, and was pacing the room, but she could not hear what he was saying.

"Am I much changed?" he had said. "I thought I was not; but since I have returned, I feel, my dear

mother, that I am indeed no longer the boy you fostered, but a man. And, oh, that I were a man, to protect you and yours from all harm!"

The body of Pasht was decently burnt on a funeral pyre made in the garden. Tertia insisted on this mark of respect being shown to her ill-starred favourite, and herself officiated as chief mourner, applying the torch with averted face, as she had heard was proper. The ashes were collected and placed in a small urn, upon which Tertia had this inscription written—

To My Pasht,
Her Mistress Sorrowing.
S. T. T. L.

The urn was placed in Tertia's own room, and Tertia hung a garland of roses on it.

CHAPTER XXIV.

ASCLETARIO.

A PART of Aulus's modest patrimony consisted of a small house on the Viminal. Piso had let this house during his ward's minority to a Greek silversmith, who took advantage of Piso's absence from Rome to underlet it to the Astrologer Ascletario. This man—an adventurer of Greek origin—was the most eminent practitioner of the Black Art then in Rome. Domitian himself had consulted him, and had winked at his remaining in the City when a clearance was made of the rank and file of soothsayers—Chaldaeans, Mathematicis, or whatever they called themselves. Ascletario's house was a Private Inquiry Office for half Rome. By whatever means, he was in possession of a great many people's secrets, and he had the art to enhance the value of what he did know, by occasionally admitting there were things he did *not* know. At the time of Apollonius's trial, every one expected to see Ascletario accused; but even the bloodthirsty and

gold-thirsty Regulus refrained from denouncing him, although every one knew that Ascletario had amassed a large fortune. Piso had been much annoyed to find Ascletario installed in his ward's house, but had perceived the impolicy of making an enemy of such a person. Now, however, formal notice was served upon him to go out in July.

The September and the October rains had washed the streets of Rome, and freshened the exhausted air; people were returning to town, but Crassus still lingered in Tuscany, where he was reported to be planning a magnificent villa, intended as a present to Domitian. Decent people were much exercised by the scandalous conduct of the Consul Lateranus, who dashed about the City in a chariot only fit for the Circus, rattling up and down the Seven Hills in the middle of the night, and coming to the sacrifice in the morning with hands hardly washed clean from locking and unlocking the drag; varying these performances by indecorous carousals at that notoriously disorderly house, the Tavern by the Idumaean Gate.

The literary public was talking about Statius, who had finished his great poem at last, and was coming up to town to recite it at Stella's house. All Stella's friends were being tormented by their friends to get them asked. Fulvia, who, since the dear Emperor meant to winter in Rome, had resolved to endure the

horrors of the *tramontana*, and stay there too, vowed she would never speak to Cotilus again if he did not get her an invitation. He did not know Stella! What of that? He knew Martial; make Martial get one. Fulvia would ask Martial to dinner by way of return. Fulvia was thinking of taking lessons at the Gladiators' School. She was told the exercises improved the figure. Cotilus said nothing should induce *him* to undergo toils fit only for Thracians, and Fulvia called him an idle dog, and pulled his ear.

Meanwhile Piso was almost always with the Emperor, and was popularly believed to be his chief adviser. The night before Domitian returned to Rome, he said at supper, as he balanced a Matian apple on his forefinger—"You will accompany us, my dear Piso? We cannot spare you any longer to your vines and olives." And then he quoted Theocritus, and scowled at Domitia, with whom he had had tiffs of late about the cornicularius Clodianus.

When Piso returned to Rome, the Campagna was all ablaze with autumn—yellows and carnations and purples, all fading at last into an amethystine grey—out of which rose the majestic ramparts of the hills, and the long line of the Claudian Aqueduct, and the glistening villas, with their towers and oaks and cypresses.

It had become a fixed idea with Cornelia that Piso

must perish if Domitian lived much longer, and she believed that, if Piso would but tacitly consent, there were those who would remove the tyrant. But Piso sternly refused even to hear of the matter. Meanwhile the New Year came in, and, to the surprise of many, Flavius Clemens was Consul, his colleague being Domitian himself. In the Consular procession, the Emperor naturally so entirely eclipsed his brother Consul, that the bearing of Clemens was hardly noticed. Some said, indeed, that he was *not* present at the sacrifice, having been stopped by an unfavourable omen at the Great Stairs. Martial, when Fulvia asked him about this, replied, that he could not say; *he* saw only Caesar, and forgot there was so much as another Consul—a reply which, as Martial no doubt intended, was repeated from one to another, until it reached Regulus, who told it to Domitian.

Statius recited his *Thebais* to admiring Rome, and no one talked of anything else for three whole days. Fulvia renounced gymnastics, and announced her intention of going in for literature, and now lost no opportunity of praising Sulpicia, whom before she was always ridiculing. On the fourth day, people began to talk about the absence of Crassus, and to say that Domitian was going to order him to come back and give his advice on the Alban Games.

Cornelia used the pretext of a slight return of

Calpurnia's fever in the spring to consult Ascletario, with the utmost difficulty prevailing on Aemilia to accompany her. They went by night, and in disguise, dressed like the wife of a well-to-do tradesman and her servant—but had reason to believe that the Astrologer knew them. Ascletario disdained the raw-head and bloody-bones furniture of commonplace wizards, and in both his dress and surroundings affected the simplicity of the philosopher. He was a man of dignified mien, prematurely bald, with a high and ample forehead, and penetrating eyes. His proper place seemed to be a professor's pulpit. He looked long and carefully at Calpurnia's horoscope, then at Cornelia, and said quietly—

"I see that this young lady is of very illustrious birth, but great perils beset her between the thirteenth and fifteenth years of life—sickness, enemies, treacherous friends. There is a rich and wicked suitor—let her not listen to him—and there is a poor, honest man. Here we have Mars in the Fourth House, in quartile with Mercury, showing danger to the young lady's family; and here is Saturn in the Ninth House, in quartile with the Sun—the Sun being the sign of the woman—threatening the anger of the Gods to the suitor."

"Which of them?" asked Cornelia.

"I know not," replied Ascletario; "but he is in

your house." He paused, and then suddenly folding the horoscope together, said, as he fixed his eyes on Cornelia, "We have here some of the elements of an imperial nativity, but they are all annulled by the influences of Saturn and Mars."

Meanwhile, Crassus was in a pitiable state of indecision. The great move—which was to sweep Domitian off the board, and substitute Publius Crassus—seemed farther off than ever, and whenever he thought of it, he thought, too, of his lost ring, and felt a cold chill —just such as he would feel when, all being lost, he should have pressed the secret spring, and raised the open box to his lips. There was a network of conspiracy all round, but the meshes were too loosely knit. There were those who still corresponded with Apollonius, and hoped yet to see Nerva Emperor. There were others who looked to the East; and yet others who thought the Spaniard, Ulpius Trajan, was the only man for us. All these plotters and would-be plotters were like players hanging about a gaming-table, casting longing glances towards the dice-boxes, but not daring to venture on a throw, lest, instead of the Venus, there should come out the dog. It would not be difficult to destroy Domitian—mushrooms were gone out of fashion, but a Matian apple would do—but who could tell who would catch the Sceptre of the World as it fell from his grasp? By what a toss-up

did Claudius succeed Caligula! Crassus thought it all out, until it seemed to him that the great move would sweep, not Domitian only, but all the pieces from the chess-board, and that whenever or however the sceptre should change hands, the first actors in the business must assuredly perish. And so men held their breath, like travellers in the Alps, who fear lest a word spoken may dislodge an avalanche.

CHAPTER XXV.

CHIONE.

All this time Crassus was in Tuscany, ostensibly absorbed in superintending the labours of his architect, and watching the walls of his Villa, as they slowly rose out of the chaos of blocks of Lucullan marble and cipollino, which the long trains of waggons discharged day and night, until the gaping vicani said that one would think Crassus was going to build a new Rome. But he was not so much engrossed by this undertaking as to find time for nothing else. Time would, indeed, have hung heavy on his hands, but for a long series of stormy scenes with Chione—scenes which he found unaccountably, ridiculously, incredibly interesting. He asked himself wherein she differed from any other beautiful and accomplished slave-girl? He told himself that he was become a green boy again—a lover in one of Terence's comedies, who goes about sighing like a furnace for the sake of

a handsome courtesan. He almost believed that he was bewitched. What if there *was* something, after all, in the stories of the Gods? What if he *had* incurred the vengeance of Venus by that impious defiance? It was monstrous, ridiculous, degrading! He, Publius Calpurnius Crassus, who had all his life considered women as the chief ministers of man's pleasure, to be prized as rare cups of murrha or fine gems are prized—with this difference, however, whereas the value of myrrhine cups and of precious stones remains the same, or even increases with age, women are only valuable while young. In Crassus's peculiar views of life and pleasure, the inevitable deterioration which age brings to beauty was a main element in the delight which beauty gave.

"I prize you more than I do my statue of Venus, Chione," he would say, with his mocking smile, "because she will remain for ever beautiful. Even if some one broke her nose, we should still admire her, and reconstruct her perfections from her ruins. But when you are sixty years old, the plainest little fire-girl in my kitchen would not change with you. A woman's beauty is like the perfume of wine—it passes as we enjoy it. I may take my own time about the contemplation of my Venus. There she waits, while one generation after another stands and admires her. But you are like those rarest wines,

which, rough when too new, and bitter when too old, are nectar in their prime."

He had said these things to other women, and they had pouted, or whimpered, or stared at him, and called him "odd." But Chione defied him. No matter what his mood, she was always ready to outdo him. If he sneered, she answered him with sarcasm more biting than his own. If he affected a brutal frankness, she was more savagely frank still. She turned his own contempt against himself, and talked to him of his own character with the same pitiless cynicism with which he spoke of the rest of mankind.

"You are afraid of yourself," she would say. "You are for ever asking yourself what is your opinion of Publius Crassus. And at bottom you are terribly afraid he is not quite so clever a fellow as he makes out. You only despise other men because you fancy yourself thus safe from *their* contempt. You are like a schoolboy sitting at a feast under his preceptor's eyes, only you are yourself both preceptor and scholar. You have tried to form yourself on a Greek model, until you are neither a Greek nor a Roman. We Greeks think because we enjoy thinking —you Romans think because you are ashamed of enjoying. Your dull Roman palate can never have sauce enough—you must think of me, forsooth, grown withered and grey, before you can see that I am

young. Oh, how I laugh to see you clumsy Romans ambling along, trying to overtake our nimble Greek Pegasus!"

Sometimes Crassus was provoked to genuine anger by these contemptuous speeches—more often, he called his cynicism to his aid, and replied in the same tone. But the end of it all was that he found himself actually piqued by this girl's ill opinion of him. He felt that it would be ridiculous to have her whipped for that insolent comparison of the Greek and Roman intellect—it would be the justification of all she had ever said about the brutal, thick-witted Romans. He fancied he saw her smile, even while she writhed under the lash, and heard her say, "I am now convinced, Sir, of the superiority of the Roman intellect."

"What a fool I am grown!" he exclaimed to himself. "I am like a boy who has quarrelled with his playfellow. I am a double-dyed fool. I am angry with her for thinking of mankind as I think myself. I am furious with her for not being fool enough to think me wiser than she is! I am positively losing my temper! Curse her, if she had not got my ring, she would never have obtained this power over me! But I'll find it! I'll have the Villa searched!"

He did so more than once, pretending that he had

lost something else. But all his searches were fruitless, and so were his threats of having Chione whipped. He came to the conclusion that, even if she had the ring, she had left it in Rome—it certainly was not in the Villa. Perhaps she had given it to that Praetorian with whom he had once caught her talking. He had reproached her furiously, with brutal threats and insults; but she had replied by asking whether it was his command that she should refuse to answer an officer of the Palace when he spoke to her?

Crassus perceived, with rage at himself, that he was jealous of Clodianus. He suspected Chione of a lurking admiration for him. Even while she seemed to be sneering at the greatness of Rome—as though hers were the triumph of matter over mind—Crassus fancied a reservation in her words. And when she sometimes attributed to his countrymen "a sort of barbarous sublimity," he believed she was thinking of the cornicularius. Crassus even fell so low as to regard himself in a mirror, and try to judge of his personal appearance.

"I am neither well nor ill," he said to himself. "It seems to me that the toga does not sit amiss upon me; but I am philosopher enough—whatever that minx may say—to know that I am neither better nor worse than the first hundred persons one may

meet as he goes to the Baths. I am not handsome. What then? These handsome men are all vain fools! Clodianus probably has not a thought beyond whether his armour becomes him. I could turn him inside out with my little finger. I could put a ring in his nose and lead him about like a bull——"

"Are you looking to see if you have splashed your toga, Crassus?" asked Chione, who came in and caught her master in the middle of this scrutiny. "Here is a patch of mud on the fringe. I wonder you wear a toga in the country."

"A man looks like a cook in a tunic," said Crassus. "I have not sufficient vanity to go about dressed like a cook."

"The laticlave will prevent anybody from taking you for a cook, Crassus," observed Chione, as she rubbed the fringe together to get the mud off.

"Is that a sarcasm?" asked Crassus.

"It is very strange, Crassus, that on the most simple observation you accuse me of sarcasm."

"I wish to let you know I have eyes and ears," said Crassus, "and am not so thick-witted as some of my countrymen."

"You see and hear many things, Crassus, which do not exist."

"I thought the philosophers were all agreed that could not be?" said Crassus, provokingly. "I

thought they had agreed that even the thinking of a thing proves its existence? How much more, then, the seeing? Why do you smile?"

"At your modesty, Crassus."

"My modesty? I am sure you don't believe I have any modesty!"

"Indeed, Crassus, you appear to me excessively modest."

"What do you mean?"

"Have you not just now expressed such diffidence of your own judgment as to acknowledge that even your eyes are more to be depended on?"

"Oh, these subtilties in which you Greeks spend your lives!" cried Crassus. "You are as cold as ice. You talk of love, but you never love. You pick the rose to pieces, and lecture on it, and build up a philosophical edifice on the foundation of a few torn rose-leaves! Your blood is not blood—it is ichor! Who taught you so much about love? You have no right to know——"

"I know nothing, master, I assure you, but what you have been so kind as to teach me," said Chione. She looked him full in the eyes with a triumphant smile. It maddened Crassus. He burst out with a great oath, raised his hand as if he would strike her, and then suddenly rushed from the room instead.

Left there alone, Chione too gazed into the mirror,

which reflected a pale image of her beauty, as like the reality as moonlight is like sunlight.

As she looked at herself, her eyes dilated. "I hate him!" she whispered to the image. "I hate him!" Then for a moment her face relaxed, and she seemed just going to burst into tears, but she summoned back the old look of contemptuous indifference. "No; I hate him!" she said. "I hate him! And he cannot hurt me while I hate him!"

Whatever feeling towards her master may have lurked at the bottom of her heart, Chione's mind had long been filled with bitter resentment. If she did not really hate him, it was because her woman's instinct showed her that this heartless, cynical Roman did, in spite of all his heartlessness, desire her good opinion. She laughed to herself at her triumph. "I am his slave—his toy," she said to herself. "He could crucify me if he would, and yet he is angry that I do not love him!"

The relations of these two persons were very strange. Perhaps the contrast between Chione's condition and character was what attracted Crassus. Perhaps her open defiance of him had put him on his mettle. She had obtained an extraordinary ascendency over him, of which he was partially conscious. Sometimes, for days together, they did not meet. Then he would send for her, make her

sup with him, talk to her of Greece, pay her extravagant compliments, even while treating her with cynical disdain.

These interviews usually ended in a quarrel—bantering on Crassus's part, serious on Chione's. Chione had not been born a slave. She had good reason to believe that she was the child of free Athenian parents, settled in the Island of Cythera. This belief, cherished by her through the years of her slavery, had kept alive that self-respect, the loss of which is the most cruel part of slavery. Upon the whole, till now her life had been an easy one. The slave-master from whom Crassus had purchased her had taken the same care of her that a man does of a valuable horse. He had educated her, because accomplishments enchanced the price even of a beautiful slave. Chione was still very young in years. She had but just crossed the threshold of womanhood when Crassus bought her; but the circumstances of her life had given her a precocious maturity. She seemed to herself to have grown old in thinking, and to have had no youth. Having no defence but her own will—the will of a slave!—she had grown hard, defiant, caustic in speech, instinctively endeavouring to lift herself nearer to her master's level on the stepping-stone of her own contempt. And she had strangely succeeded. The scoffing soul

of Crassus had winced beneath the thrusts of a keener sarcasm than his own. She enraged him—she stirred him to a hot wrath, such as his coldly rancorous heart had never felt before. She irritated him till his self-control was shaken, and he became like the men he despised—the sport of the moment's passion. He often hated her fiercely enough to kill her, and yet he knew that, if he killed her, she, not he, would have conquered. Mankind for him consisted of Chione and the rest of the world. And yet Chione herself, who knew this, did not think he was in love with her. There was something else, some tumult of the soul, which at times overpowered the commonplace, sensuous attraction which she had for him. It might almost be said that while he loved her with his senses, he hated her with his mind—hated her with so fierce a hatred, that often, when he had sent for her, he could only, when she came, burst out in outrageous abuse and threats.

In calm moments, Crassus clearly perceived the extraordinary mental crisis through which he was passing, and ascribed it to some of those occult influences of Nature, in which even Epicureans implicitly believed. He even thought of consulting an astrologer, that he might learn what it was that had happened to him.

Crassus's state of mind was further inflamed by

the ridiculous jealousy which he had conceived for the cornicularius Clodianus. He knew that this man had had several interviews with Chione—all so apparently accidental that even Crassus's suspicions were baffled, though not disarmed. Except with Hylas, Chione was popular in the household. She was generous, and always willing to sing or tell stories for the benefit of her fellow-slaves; nor did she take on herself with the women any of those petty airs by which Hylas had made himself detested by the male slaves. They therefore were not ready to tell tales of her, and Crassus felt sure that if she met Clodianus anywhere he would be the last to hear of it.

As for Hylas, he had never been more than a toy, and Crassus was tired of him. His coquettish ways had lost their novelty; there never had been much variety in them. Hylas was apt to repeat himself. His idea of an effective quarrel with his master was to sit at the foot of a column with his finger in his mouth, and his beautiful eyes opened unnaturally wide, staring at vacancy with an expression which he meant to be one of gloomy passion. It made Crassus laugh. He called Hylas a pretty, sulky Cupid, and asked him whether his mother had been boxing his ears, or whether he was fretting because his beard was shooting?

This allusion to his beard always stung Hylas to fury. He would spring up and rush away, stamping his feet, with genuine hatred filling his worthless, effeminate little soul—a soul so worthless, that anything genuine, even hatred, was almost a virtue in it.

So winter passed, spring came, and Domitian ordered Crassus to return.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PHILTRE WORKS.

Crassus had been peremptorily ordered back to Rome. He had gained a few months—or had lost them; he found it impossible to decide which. "Strike when the iron is hot," says the proverb; and Crassus was tortured by the suspicion that the iron had been hot at the time of Apollonius's trial, but was hot no longer. All that machinery which Apollonius could set in motion had been just then—or so it seemed to Crassus—riper for action than now. There was no hope in the Senate; it was letting itself be killed off piecemeal, and the new Senators—Knights, freedmen, and sons of freedmen—were not the sort of men who rise against a tyrant. "If that accursed witch had not stolen my ring," he said to himself, "how do I know but that the whole affair might have turned out differently?" He continued to tell himself that Chione had his ring—any other explanation was too dreadful. There were no Gods—Lucius himself did not believe

in them. Yet one heard queer stories. There must be many forces at work in nature of which we know little or nothing. Lightning, for instance, and thunder —which has undoubtedly been heard under a clear sky. But, of course, Chione had the ring. "She has not sold it, so her motive probably was to make sure I did not use it," he said to himself. "Little fool; but she is certainly fond of me. I am not deceived by her insolence, artful minx!—and she is amazingly handsome!"

Crassus had supped at Fulvia's overnight with Martial—who thus received his price for a ticket he got Fulvia to hear Statius read his *Thebais*. It was a merry evening, and Crassus drank more than he intended. Indeed, he had several times, since that confounded night when he lost his ring, drunk more than he intended. When a man's mind is always bothered by a problem he cannot solve, it is a temptation to take t'other cup, and try whether there be not *in vino sapientia*. But the other cup proved to be of a Falernian which had been kept till it was heady. The weather, too, was close and unwholesome. Crassus, who had meant to devote the whole day to improving the cypher in which he corresponded with some persons in Asia, found himself, as noon approached, indisposed for anything but a siesta. He struggled for some time, but the figures ran together,

and though he bathed his eyes with Marcian water—which every one knows has always been considered the most refreshing of all the Roman waters—he could not keep awake. Afraid lest sleep should surprise him, he hid his cypher in a secret place, and stretched himself on the couch.

There presently he fell into a heavy stupor, which had so much of sleep in it, that it was disturbed by dreams. They were not like dreams either. He knew where he was—in his own library, lying on the couch with the lion's feet. He knew that it was nearly noon, and his closed eyes were at first aware of the reflection of the sunshine from the walls of the temples and palaces on the Palatine. Then darkness settled down, and a grateful coolness; but still he knew where he was, and that he was yielding unwillingly to this drowsiness, which weighed on all his senses like an actual weight—pressing them gently yet heavily to rest, but leaving the conscious *I* almost as active as ever—as able to plan, and to desire, as eager to know whether the name of Publius Calpurnius Crassus should ever be written in the list of Emperors of Rome. He knew that he was awake, and he meant presently to rouse himself and think. He had much to think of—to decide upon. "I am awake," he said to himself; "but since I am too heavy to work out the great problem, I will think of my ring. How was

it lost? Shall I recover it, and with it the luck of Publius Crassus?"

Then the black gulf of forgetfulness swallowed him up for a space, and casting him out again, left him still in that heavy stupor, when he could not open his eyes or lift a finger, and yet knew where he was. And it seemed to him that Chione was speaking in his ear, in so quiet and measured a voice that she roused him no more than a voice in a dream, and he thought she said—

"Why did you give your ring to Venus? She is fair, but she is marble, and if the marble grew warm, and she stepped down from her pedestal, she would smile as kindly on every one of her lovers as she did on you. The fickle jade! Her warmth is the warmth of the sun—you must share it with all the world. How many mortal lovers has she had? But I—I am snow to all the world, but fire to you! And am I not fair? You think, because she is a Goddess, her love is sweeter than mine; but, seen close, what difference is there between Gods and men?"

Then as it were a billow of drowsy forgetfulness swept over Crassus, and when he rose again to the surface, Chione was saying, "*I* have your ring. I took it from Venus—and well for you I did! A poison ring! A pretty gift to Venus! What if she had taken you at your word, and touched your lips with

the death you gave her as a love-token? Fool! what know you of love, or what sort of a lover are you, to give such a pledge to her that loves life and joy! You would, I suppose, build a cypress bower, and spread a funeral couch, and provide parsley crowns, and a cake of honey, and a dish of lettuces and beans? You bid Venus to the feast of death; but I have saved you from it—*I* bid you to the feast of life!"

Then in his dream it seemed to Crassus that Chione laid her hand on his lips, and that he felt the ring upon her finger. But he could not move; and, indeed, at the moment, all desire to move had left him. He only thought that he would like to open his eyes and see what sort of a look was in Chione's as she spoke. "The wild cat!" he thought. "I love to torment her—yet she could be dangerous, I fancy; but I must have my ring——"

But once more the jaws of forgetfulness swallowed him. And then—but how long after he did not know—he awoke with a start, crying out of the midst of what seemed a dreamless sleep, "Give me my ring! my ring, I say!"

He was alone. The glass of Marcian water still stood beside the dish of raisins, which had been brought in to him as usual a little before noon—no, the glass was empty—yet Crassus fancied he had

drunk but half. He turned up the glass; one drop remained—he thought it had a peculiar, though very slight taste. He could not tell; he had perfumed his hands with "royal unguent," and perhaps the pungency he fancied he detected was due to that. But yet he thought he remembered leaving the glass half full. However, there was no one in the room, nor any trace of any one, and the heaviness he had felt, and which had now completely vanished, was probably caused by that too old Falernian which he had drunk at Fulvia's.

An impulse moved him to go up to the symposium. He heard the ninth hour announced by the hour-caller as he left the library; he had slept three hours. The shutters of the symposium were closed, but the windows were open, and the roar of the Forum—where everybody was now beginning to think of going to dinner—came up like the dull murmur of sea-waves. The rich hangings were all covered up with linen cloths—the vast hall seemed to be taking its siesta in the hot, dusty afternoon. One ray of light found its way through a chink in the shutters, and lay across the hall like a beam, the motes glittering and dancing in it like living things. One end of it rested on the head of Venus, which thus stood out in a startling glare of illumination. The glare was so strong that it hurt Crassus's eyes, bringing the

water into them. Venus looked at him out of a fiery glow of light; on her lips he fancied there lurked a smile of contempt—a sneer, if a Goddess can sneer. He drew nearer, to look at the hand on which he had placed the ring. He felt a desire to defy heaven. "Venus, you are beautiful," he said aloud—his voice echoed uncomfortably through the sleepy hall—"but you are no more divine than Chione. Some mortal maiden—some Chione, long since a little heap of black ashes—was the sculptor's model, and lent you her charming form, Madam Venus, and you ought to feel very much obliged to her for the credit she has done you. I'll wager the ring you stole from me that you were not as pretty as she in your day!"

Crassus stood on tiptoe, and chucked Venus under the chin as he said this.

"Beware!" said a voice behind him. "Venus avenges herself on those who blaspheme her!"

At the first word Crassus was so startled that he cried out; but the next instant he recognized Chione's voice, and turned to her laughing—with a bad grace, however, for he had been abominably scared.

"You are afraid of them, though you deny them," said Chione. She looked like a Goddess herself—tall, large, majestic, full of warm, strong life. "You are as much frightened as a boy in the dark. How you started when I spoke!"

"Where is my ring?" said Crassus.

"Ask Venus. You gave it to Venus," replied Chione, with a mocking smile, which inflamed Crassus with anger, but also with something as near to passion as his nature could feel.

"*You* have it; you took it from her; you confessed it just now in the library, when you thought I was asleep," he said.

"In the library—just now?" cried Chione. "I call Venus herself to witness that I have been all the morning with the cymbal-players, teaching them the dance you described to me—the one you saw performed at Aegina. Ask them——"

"Oh, they would say yes! They would swear they left you but now in the textrina," said Crassus, with a sneer. "You accursed Greek witch! you Circe——"

"Nay, not Circe," said Chione, "for she turned men into swine. I would, if I could, turn a swine into a man."

"Do you hold such language to me?" cried Crassus, stamping his foot. "Do you forget you are my slave—that I can have you tortured?"

"You can; but you never will," said Chione, folding her white arms across her shapely bosom. Her whole form seemed to dilate as she smiled with imperial disdain upon her master.

"Why not—why shall I not?" said Crassus. "I sometimes think I shall kill you myself some day. In Tuscany, I half made up my mind to it. I'll kill you—or I'll sell you!"

"Never—you will never do either," said Chione, still with that superb disdain. So the Goddesses appeared to mortals, growing more and more divinely majestic as they talked with them. Crassus felt the strength die out of his arms—he seemed scarcely able to move—he staggered up against the pedestal of Venus's statue, and stood leaning there for support.

"No," he said; "you are right. I shall never sell you, because I believe you wish I would. I would give a good deal to be sure of it," he continued, in a drowsy tone. "I've half a mind to sell you, just to find out. After all, I hate you!"

They stood there, master and slave, looking at each other; the master trying to force himself to meet his slave's eyes, the slave boldly defying her master.

"Oh, these spring languors!" he said, wiping his damp brow. Then suddenly turning on Chione, he cried furiously, "What did you put in my cup of Marcian water? You accursed witch! you have poisoned me with your Thessalian arts——"

"You were drunk last night," said Chione, calmly; "and because Fulvia's Falernian has got into your head, you accuse me of poisoning you."

"You drugged the Marcian water," said Crassus—but now he spoke feebly; the curious lassitude of the morning was coming over him again. "What did you give me? I see you in a golden mist, as though the threads of your hair made a net of fire. What have you done to me? Why am I not angry with you? Where is my ring?"

"Venus has it," said Chione, mockingly. "If you knew what you said when you gave it to her, you would be frightened indeed! You invoked curses on your own head if you ever took back that pledge. 'May all the ill I wish to others fall on me,' you said, 'if ever mortal finger wears this ring again!'"

"Did I say that?" said Crassus, turning a deadly yellow. "And did Parthenius hear me?"

"I thought that would touch you," said Chione, quietly. "He was awake, and I think he heard; but he was drunk, and I think he forgot."

"Chione, why do you look so at me? How dare you provoke me thus? Do you know who I am, and what you are?"

"*You* are Publius Calpurnius Crassus, a Roman Patrician, a Senator, an Augustal, and Arbiter of Pleasures to our Lord God Titus Flavius Domitianus Augustus," said Chione. "And *I* am your slave."

"And an accursed Thessalian sorceress," interrupted Crassus, "whom I will send to the dungeons."

"I am the only woman that ever loved you, or ever will love you," said Chione; "and I often hate you. Did I say I loved you? I never did—I think I always hated you! I hate you now!" She looked more gloriously beautiful than ever as she said this, and Crassus, who had been more in earnest in his threats than usual, muttered, "No, curse her, she is too beautiful! I would as soon grind up this priceless Venus to make a pavement of as spoil her beauty with tortures!"

"You had better go to the library and sleep off the fumes of Fulvia's wine," observed Chione. She hated Fulvia, who had once spoken insolently to her. "It is unlike you to drink so deep; you used to make others drink."

"It is not the wine—it is your infernal philtre," said Crassus, and, despite the hot afternoon, he shivered, and looked a miserable object in contrast with the rich warm life which breathed from Chione. "It has failed, however, for, far from being infatuated, as you hoped, I see more plainly than ever what an accursed witch you are! I suppose you threw away the rest of the water while I slept, lest it should finish me; and that, I suppose, is not your game yet—not till you get your freedom."

"No; I do not love you! I hate you!" cried Chione, with blazing eyes and heaving bosom. She

made a motion as if to tear her hair and rend her garments—it was the gesture of Medea reproaching Jason—but as the wealth of her topaz-hued tresses came tumbling about her ivory shoulders, rage seemed to give way to despair. She wrung her hands, and falling on her knees, broke into a passion of weeping.

"The jade loves me, after all," said Crassus to himself, flattered by this spectacle. He allowed her to weep for a few moments while he noted the statuesque lines of her bowed head and shoulders and the graceful folds of her drapery. Then, reflecting that she was making her eyes red, he went to her, and tried to pull away her hands from her face. "Silly little fool!" he said. "Get up, and come and rub my feet till I go to sleep. Whether you have got my ring or no—and I'll wager ten thousand sestertii that you have—you are infernally handsome, and when you are angry, you are like a white and yellow tigress. Come, cease this folly, and let us be friends again. So you really think Parthenius was too drunk to remember what I said? I can believe it, for I was too drunk to remember it myself."

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MORNING CALL.

At Baiae, Piso had longed for Rome. Now, in Rome, he often wished himself back at Baiae, among his vines. Domitian seemed to delight in forcing him to take part in all the frivolities of the Court, and made a point of consulting him upon the exhibitions of female gladiators, races of maidens, combats of Knights and Senators, and all the other outrages of public decency which made good men blush for Rome.

Piso was also compelled in some degree to mix in society he despised. Regulus forced himself upon him, and almost forced Piso to visit him in return. Besides the clients, the great army of parasites, legacy-hunters, flatterers, informers, laid wait for him in public places. Poets dedicated verses to him, and gently hinted that his atrium was admirably adapted for a recitation. Persons looking out for government contracts set on their friends to get him to speak for them to Caesar. Fathers and uncles who wanted a

six-months' tribuneship for a son or nephew; rising barristers who desired the "rights of three children;" provincial towns which wanted permission to establish a Fire Brigade; an architect who wanted a commission for an aqueduct; or, in short, anybody who wanted anything to which influence could help him sought out Piso, or caused him to be sought out, and if nothing came of it, felt himself to be eternally wronged.

From it all Piso turned to his *History*, writing stern and vigorous sentences about the rise of faction and the decay of patriotism; and from his *History* he went back to the Palace, and schooled his looks, and set a guard on his lips, and saw a snare in every word that was addressed to him.

He grew restless. He would wander about his wife's apartments, ask listlessly what she was doing, take up the pieces of feminine work which lay about, and then perhaps say, with a sigh, as he put them down again—

"What are all man's concerns but toys a little larger than these?"

One day he came in as Aemilia was dressing her hair before she went out for a drive.

"To call on Fulvia," she said, when he asked her where she was going. "I must; she has called on me six times. I go to-day because I hope she will

be out. There is a recitation at the house of Regulus —some young poet from Vienna, I believe, is to recite his verses, and she is almost sure to be there."

"I suppose we must not offend her," said Piso, gloomily. As he stood there, behind his wife, watching her in the mirror, he noticed some small streaks of grey among his own dark brown locks. "Aemilia," he said, "I am growing grey."

"I have observed it this some while," she said. And then she rose and put her arms round him.

"My love! my delight!" she cried. "It is the cruel anxiety we live in. I, too, have found some grey hairs of late; but I pulled mine out."

"I have too many, my Aemilia. Remember the man in the fable," said Piso, smiling. "Yet is it not somewhat shameful that the fear of death should turn a man's hair grey? Indeed, I am ashamed. This turning grey is a premonition of our natural decay; and so, for fear of death, we, as it were, begin to die! The Cynics are right. Man is a contemptible animal —a beast that can die of fear of what shall be to-morrow."

"To me the only death is to hear you talk thus of death, Lucius," said Aemilia, looking at him wistfully. "Why do you talk so? You are but little past forty, and still in your prime. We have lived many years, certainly; but may we not have yet many

more years to live—as many, perhaps, as we have lived?"

"But not as many, my sweet Aemilia, as we had to live twenty years ago," said Piso. "It is hard, I suppose, for living men to think of death; life has no part in death, nor death in life. And yet, Aemilia, be the day never so bright, each moment brings the night nearer. With sure, though silent steps, death is approaching—or, to speak more truly, *we* are on our way to *him*. By whatever way we go, he, and none other, awaits us at the end. This alone can be said of every man, that he was born, and will die. And what is this but to say that he was not always here, and will not be here always? And so the chief fact about every man is that he is *not*."

"Good men are followed by the love of their friends, and their glory outlives them," said Aemilia.

"What is it now to the great Julius that he is called *Divus?*" said Piso. "The ashes in his funeral urn are cold, and if they were exchanged for the ashes of a slave, should we know the difference? When I think, Aemilia, of the uncertainty of this life of man—when I see that a man can die of the sting of a wasp, and that a few breaths of unwholesome air can bring down the strength of an athlete, I ask myself what malignant deity has made man his sport? The whole human race, Aemilia, sits, like

Tantalus, by the waters it cannot drink, the fruits it cannot taste. The Gods show us what we might be, that we may consume our hearts in discovering that we cannot be it."

Aemilia found Fulvia dressing for a banquet at Stella's. She received Aemilia at her toilet, which was not proceeding smoothly. The tower of curls which sometimes added a cubit to a lady's stature had been built up awry by Euphrasia, the tirewoman, and Fulvia had just thrown the hand-mirror at her, as Aemilia was shown in.

"Take that, you pig! you ass! you lump! you ape!" cried Fulvia, flinging the mirror with so good an aim that it caught Euphrasia on the forehead, and she fell to the ground bleeding. "Get up, you beast! Don't lie there howling. Get up, and do my hair properly this instant, or I'll have you flogged! Ah, my dear Aemilia, how glad I am to see you! Sit down there and talk to me while this idiot tries to do my hair. Just see what she's made of me! Now then, Euphrasia, take care; you're pulling my hair. Now you're running a hair-pin into me! Pick up the glass—wipe it before you give it me. And oh, good heavens! you've let your filthy blood fall on my dress. Here! Syra, Phyllis, Cynthia—some of you bring some hot water directly! Really, Aemilia, one's servants are enough to be the death of one! Even

whipping does them very little good. I'll send you into the country, Euphrasia; that's how I'll punish *you!* You shall go and work in a gang, and see how you like that! I've told you six hundred times at least that I want the curls fastened up so as to look easy and natural, and you've done them as stiff as a wig! Just look at them, Aemilia! Here, Syra, you try—and Phyllis, just go and ask Sosthenes to step here a moment—he's in the library—just fetch him."

Sosthenes came in, with his stylus behind his ear and a worried expression on his countenance.

"Oh, Sosthenes!" said Fulvia, looking not at him, but in her mirror, and arranging a curl here and there with her finger, "do just step round for me to Cosmus's, will you—his shop is just before you come to the Forum, you know—and get me a box of perfume."

"I do not know the shop," began Sosthenes.

"Well! ask, then; you know the Roman tongue!" said Fulvia. "Be as quick as you can."

"What am I to get? Lavender?"

"Lavender? Gods! no. Get something new—ask him for the newest thing. What are you waiting for? The money? Well, I don't know what it will be; but here's—— Well, now, that *is* tiresome! I forgot that my purse was empty. I cleaned myself

out yesterday with those British pearls. Pretty, aren't they, Aemilia? Well, Sosthenes, I must ask you to pay for it yourself—or, stay, tell him to put it in the bill."

The unhappy Sosthenes departed with evident reluctance.

"I never saw such a fellow—he won't do the least thing to make himself useful!" said Fulvia. "If it wasn't that he wrote such capital Greek verses for Tiberius, I'd send him packing. Do but look, Aemilia, at this sweet back-scratcher that I got as a present at a banquet the other day—at the Consul Lateranus's. Isn't it lovely? An ivory hand. Exquisite, really. We had tickets—it was just like a lottery. Splendid presents, some of them were. Regulus got a short-hand writer, and Veiento got a statuette of Apollo. How do you like my dress? The new colour, you know; Roman smoke, they call it—"fumum Romae"—with pink ornaments. It's very becoming to people of some complexions; but *I* like something a little gayer."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PRAISE OF EPICURUS.

Crassus had invited Veiento, Martial, and some other choice spirits to dine with him. He was rather uneasy at Veiento's manner, and wanted to propitiate him. That subtle change in his character, of which he was himself aware, and attributed to the loss of his ring, made him nervously alive to people's manner. He was even growing half afraid of Chione. A superstitious notion had got hold of him that his fortunes had passed into her power along with the ring. He often accused her of having it, and threatened a search, and Chione replied, defying, but not denying. He was always quarrelling with her now. That handsome young Praetorian, Clodianus, the corniculariius, was always coming with messages to Crassus, and he had more than once caught Chione talking to him.

He came this very evening, soon after the banquet had begun, and Crassus, who of late had not cared to

let Chione sing when he had company, hurried out, with an apology to his guests. But he found no one in the atrium except Clodianus and his own janitor.

The business was soon despatched. Crassus saw Clodianus safely off, and returned to find his guests in the midst of a lively discussion.

"We were asking if any one had ever seen your cousin's *History?*" said Veiento. How Crassus hated him at that moment! He was by no means ready yet for Piso's fall—his plans were not nearly ripe. "What is it a history of? And have *you* seen it?"

"I know nothing whatever about it," said Crassus, promptly. "I believe—but do not know—that he *is* writing something; but I understood it was a treatise on vines."

"Another Plinius Secundus?" said Veiento—and he either sneered, or was so used to sneering that he seemed to sneer when he did not.

But Crassus answered with a perfectly disengaged air, "Well, something of that sort. Or in Columella's style, perhaps. He is perfectly mad on the culture of vines."

"Precisely so," observed Veiento. "Unluckily, Caesar has just perceived that the vine is encroaching too much on the corn-lands, so I doubt if he will like your cousin's book." Veiento's manner was

indescribably offensive, and yet it would have been impossible to resent it—he spoke with so admirably feigned an appearance of merely stating a fact. But he was not going to let Crassus off so. He continued, "I rather fancy, however, that you are mistaken, Crassus, and that he really is writing a history. Or he may be writing both—— "

"Of course he may," said Crassus, perceiving an opportunity of turning the conversation, and desperately seizing it. "What an immense amount of literature is being produced nowadays! This is a second Augustan age! Every one writes—women and all—and we have a dozen good poets at least, without counting the epigrammatists. There are Statius, and Silius Italicus, on whom Vergil's mantle has fallen. Then there are Palaemon, Gaurus, Attalus, Fidentinus, Sextus, Lucius, Sulpicia, Caecilius Secundus, and our venerable Nerva—not to speak of a hundred others, some of whom it is perhaps better not to mention—all very respectable writers, though few of them indeed are equal to our little Martial—— "

"Fidentinus, at least," said Martial, "is upon a perfect equality with me—for since he steals all his verses from me, they must be at least as good as mine."

"Excellent, excellent!" said Crassus. "Pray turn that into an epigram and send it to Fidentinus."

"But yourself, Crassus? Is none of your own great work yet written?" asked Martial.

"Mine?" said Crassus—the vanity of an author contending visibly with his habitual cynicism. "I have done very little, though I have a great deal of it in my head. I am an idle dog; I shall never finish it."

"What is this, Crassus?" asked Veiento, with sudden interest. "Are you, too, turning poet? And I always took you for a sensible man!"

"I thank you, Veiento, in the name of my brother-poets," said Martial, laughing.

"My experience is, that so soon as a man takes to hexameters, he becomes like the frog in the fable, who swelled himself up till he burst," said Veiento.

"My verses, my dear Veiento," said Crassus, controlling his anger with difficulty, "will not, at least, be of that kind. I shall never do it—somehow, there are so many interruptions—I may perhaps begin. The plan is that of a satire—concealed, yet not concealed, under the form of a panegyric on Epicurus. I shall extol him as the greatest and wisest of men, the chief benefactor to the human race. Future ages will gradually forget Agamemnon, Hector, Achilles, and all the rest of them, and will remember Epicurus alone. The only man to be named with him is Prometheus. *He*, indeed, dis-

covered fire, without which we should have fed on roots, and remained savages till this day; but Epicurus made a still greater discovery—the sweetness of sweetness, the pleasure of pleasure. Before him, men had, it is true, a dim notion that some things were more agreeable than others, but Epicurus first made us conscious of pleasure. Let us drink, gentlemen, to the divine Epicurus!"

"To Epicurus! To the divine Epicurus!" cried all the guests; and Crassus said, "Hylas, pour out eight cups for the letters of Epicurus's name. Yes," he continued, when they had honoured the toast, "before Epicurus, men went blundering on, acting without the least regard to the pleasurableness or the painfulness of what they did—lost in the pursuit of some stupid aim or other, which, reached, could never make them happy."

"An admirable doctrine, Publius. We should have no seditions, no revolts, if all held it," said Veiento. "I wonder Domitian does not establish an Epicurean Philosopher in every city of the Empire, and let him deliver a lecture on the Kalends of every month upon the Chief Good."

"A good idea!" said Crassus. "Here alone an orator can be sincere. What to us is Agamemnon? or the *reges fortes* before him? What the sorrows of Antigone? But when a poet praises the joys of life

—the good wine, the sweets of love—he needs no midnight lamp to give his verses fervour; he can write by day inspired by all the eloquence of conviction. Pleasure was always pleasant, but it was Epicurus who first taught us to live as though we believed it, and not as though pleasure was something to be thought of when everything else was attended to. This will be the Argument of my First Book. Then will come the Five Senses, to each of which I shall devote a Book; and then in the Seventh—which I shall call *The Key to the Labyrinth*—I shall treat of those pleasures which unite the joys of all the senses. I shall show that Power and Fame are only worth having inasmuch as they procure us the means of these pleasures. Hylas, pour us out eight cups!"

"Epicurus is certainly a God," thought Crassus to himself next morning, as he lay half awake—trying to doze away the headache caused by the too unmeasured debauch of the night before; "but he is playing me a scurvy trick in return for all the homage I render him. I never meant that wine should overcome me. Drunkenness is a beastly folly—spoils the stomach and the head alike, and loosens the tongue—which in some cases is a worse ill. I wonder if I said anything imprudent last night? I remember saying that the pleasures of the senses were the only real ones; and I remember thinking that power gives one the chance

of enjoying such pleasures to the utmost. I hope I did not *say* that, however. I always thought drinking the least satisfactory of pleasures—it spoils all the others, and its consequences are disastrous. There is no folly a man will not commit, when under the influence of wine. He lets out all his secrets—*in vino veritas*. Then the headache next morning—— And yet, I calumniate the divine juice. Hylas!"

Hylas, who had been crouching curled up on the cushions at Crassus's feet, roused himself sufficiently to ask what his master wanted.

"A cup of Falernian, Hylas—a small cup, with a sprinkling of spice in it," said Crassus.

When Hylas brought the wine, Crassus took the cup, and looking at it, held it up so that the light shone through it. It was a myrrhine cup of singular transparency, through which the red Falernian mantled like liquid fire. "See, Hylas, that which is in this cup is *pleasure*," said Crassus. "We call it Falernian—but it is really pleasure. All pleasures in one, some say, for he that hath well drunk is king of the world."

"So you said last night, master, after the fifth cup to Epicurus," said Hylas.

"Infernal Gods!" cried Crassus, starting up and spilling a little of the wine. He perceived it, and, pouring a little on the floor, said, "To Fortune!"

then asked Hylas, anxiously, "What do you say I said about wine?"

"Only that he who drank it was king of the world," said Hylas.

"No more?"

"You said something about he that was king of the world being able to get the best wine," said Hylas. And then, as if he had forgotten till now, he added, "Oh, by-the-by, that Jewess from Thessalonica is waiting to speak with you."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"IF I WERE CAESAR."

Piso was now in great favour with Domitian, who was always sending for him. He did so one day —from Albanum—when Crassus was with Piso. Cornelia, for some reason of her own, chose to see here a favourable omen, and, to make it more certain by accepting it promptly, exclaimed to Tertia—

"Run, child, and fetch your father's toga—the one that hangs up in the right side of the cupboard."

Cornelia believed she had sent for a toga of the finest Apulian wool, spun and woven by herself, after the fashion of the good old times. But Tertia returned, dragging after her the identical black toga worn by Piso as mourning for Arulenus. On seeing it, Aemilia turned as pale as death.

"What is this? What have you brought, child?" Cornelia exclaimed angrily. "You know your father cannot appear in this at Albanum."

"It was hanging up where you said, grandmother,"

said Tertia, looking a little frightened. "It is the one which father wore when Uncle Arulenus died."

"No matter—do not scold the child," said Piso, who perceived Crassus's eyes fixed on himself—in hopes, no doubt, to detect some sign of annoyance at Tertia's indiscreet words, even if not of uneasiness at so sinister an omen. "Fetch me the toga you intend for me, and let me be going."

If the most complete moral and intellectual scepticism can preserve a man from superstition, Publius Crassus was not superstitious. Yet he had felt a keen throb of joy in that part of his bodily frame which he called his heart, when he saw his little cousin offer the mourning garment to her father, and his own prospects seemed to have grown suddenly a great deal brighter. If Piso were dead, Crassus would be a much greater man than he was now—when he only served as a foil to his kinsman.

"They all say they respect him; but I very much doubt whether they would like him for their master," he thought, as he reclined beside Piso in the litter; for he, too, was bound for Albanum. "A Caesar that will live and let live is what we want in Rome," he said aloud. "We have had several that lived; but they would not let live. Now, if I were Caesar, I would destroy all my enemies at the outset—make a clean sweep, as Augustus did—and rule tolerantly

ever after. These dribbling executions are a great mistake—they irritate without appalling. Then his ridiculous severity at first about morals—in imitation, I suppose, of the Divine Titus, who, between you and me, would have made Rome too hot for him, if he had reigned much longer. People won't stand such strictness; it's more unpopular than tyranny itself. Why, if our present excellent Caesar had gone on as he began, no one could have made a fortune in Rome! As it is, the Provinces are not half such good things as they used to be—at the rate he is going, the Government of Asia itself will soon be hardly worth having. Never was so little made out of the barbarians, and never was so much wrung out of us! By Hercules! it will soon be better to be a barbarian than a Roman!"

The Emperor was in the Gymnasium, and was engaged at the moment in practising archery. Gyrinus stood in front of a wooden screen, holding up one hand, with the fingers extended, while Domitian sent his arrows between the fingers. The screen was stuck so full of darts, that just as Piso entered Domitian paused, while Clodianus pulled some of them out, to make room for Gyrinus to stand.

"There you are, Piso!" cried Domitian, in his most amiable manner—it might almost be called genial. "I have sent for you to insist on your

recalling your son Caius at once. He delays too long in Greece. I hear on all sides that he is a most accomplished young man. He positively must take part in our contests next year in the Capitol. There is a messenger just starting for Athens—sit down here, and write the letter—my man shall take it. Gyrinus! fetch us pen, ink, and paper."

The unhappy father did not deceive himself. He knew that this recall could only mean that Domitian was resolved to have the whole family in his power. But any demur would have been worse than useless. He sat down in the seat which Domitian himself indicated. Gyrinus brought the writing materials, and Domitian, saying, "I'll leave you to the business of composition!" withdrew a little way off, but still in full sight of Piso, and began to talk in a low voice with Crassus.

Piso, with despair in his heart, mechanically performed his task. He informed his son that Caesar had heard favourable reports of his progress in his studies, and was pleased to command his return to Rome, that he might take part in the Poetical Contests to be held in the Capitol next year. Caius must be guided by circumstances as to his route. If this letter reached him after the sea was closed, he must return by the Egnatian Way. Of course, Eudoxus would return with him.

"Well, Piso, have you nearly finished?" called the Emperor.

"I have done, Sir. Will you see what I have said?"

"No; why should I? Quick! seal it, and let us have a game of draughts."

Alas! Piso had only his usual signet-ring with him. Caius would obey to the letter, and hasten his return. And yet, when Domitian himself had commanded it, would not delay be a still greater danger? Piso tied and sealed his letter. It was given to Clodianus, and Domitian, seeming instantly to forget all about it, ordered the plans of his Forum to be brought, and was soon eagerly consulting with Piso and Crassus on the completion of the Temple of Minerva and the arrangement of the statues which were to adorn its colonnade.

CHAPTER XXX.

A CONSULTATION OF PHYSICIANS.

The early autumn was unhealthy, and very soon after the Emperor's return a malignant fever raged in Rome. Tertia was attacked by it, as were also several of Piso's household, some of whom died. For many days Tertia's life was despaired of. In her delirium, her thoughts seemed chiefly to run upon the Procession of Bacchus in the villa-gardens at Baiae.

"I see them!" she would cry, in terror. "They are all coming along the terrace! Now they are going in at the great door—they have all got on black togas, like father's."

Tertia was possessed by the idea that she was still at Baiae, and that the Bacchantes were waiting for her in the atrium. She tried to escape from her nurses, to run out and see them, and was only still when Aemilia held her in her arms. Even here she soon grew restless again, and began to cry pitifully for Aulus.

Hearing of this from Tryphosa—for Aemilia would not send for him for fear of infection—Aulus insisted on being admitted to Tertia's room, and often carried her in his arms for hours together. Dr. Symmachus came every day—smelling at burnt laurel leaves in an agate-box, and feeling the patient's pulse through a napkin. As her fever constantly increased, he cupped her on the third day; but though after this she lay quiet, it was evident that the malady was not abated. Symmachus had Tertia's head bathed with scammony, put leeches to her temples, and ordered her decoctions of herb-mercury, with a pig's foot boiled in it, and, in her cold fits, laurel-water and baths of purslane and polenta. In due course the fever reached its critical day, Tertia had some natural sleep, and the delirium ceased. But she relapsed again and again, and, when the fever did at last leave her, she did not recover strength, but fell into what seemed to be a wasting decline. All the chief Physicians then in Rome—among them Archigenes, Dasius, and Alcon—were called in in consultation. They felt Tertia's pulse, talked learnedly of "critical periods"—Tertia had nearly completed her seventh year—and from frigid politeness soon came to acrimonious wrangling over the cause of the malady, and the best method of treating it. They conducted their arguments in Greek—the mother-

tongue of most of them; but Tertia knew they were quarrelling, and Aemilia, seeing her scared looks, got the doctors away to another apartment, where they argued so fiercely that they could be heard in the atrium. The Hector and Achilles of the fray were Symmachus and Archigenes. Symmachus, a staunch disciple of Hippocrates, was a man whose age and great experience would have made him second to no practitioner in Rome, even if he had not been the Archiatrus, or Chief of the College of Physicians. He was a Knight, and wore his gold ring with no little ostentation. There was a keen rivalry between him and Archigenes, who might be considered the rising man, and probably Symmachus's successor.

The doctors disagreed on all points—the nature of the disease, the diet, and the remedies. Symmachus relied chiefly on the virtues of ass's milk, recommending, in addition, the flesh of a she-ass, stewed in broth—a remedy much in vogue in Achaia. Archigenes, on the contrary, maintained that the medical virtues of the goat far surpass those of the ass in these wasting diseases, and recommended, as almost infallible, goat suet, taken in alica gruel, or melted with mulsum, in the proportion of one ounce of suet to a pint of the wine, stirred while it melts with a sprig of rue. The comparative merits of crane's bill root, plantago, betony, and agaric were also touched

on; but these minor questions soon merged in an angry discussion of general principles—Symmachus being an old-fashioned Dogmatic; while Alcon was a pronounced Empiric, who derided Hippocrates, and talked of the obstruction of the pores and of the distribution of atoms, propping up all he said with copious references to the practice of Asclepiades. Dasius and Archigenes both belonged to the school of the Methodici, and agreed in blaming Hippocrates for troubling his head about the causes of disease; but Dasius was an orthodox Methodicus, while Archigenes was a Pneumatic.

"Diseases must be cured by their opposites," exclaimed Symmachus. "Here we have a case of depletion—to be met, therefore, by repletion—beginning, however, with an emetic, which, as Aretaeus very well observes, often acts as a goad to the system, persuading it to a fresh effort, and thereby hastening the cure."

To this, Alcon replied tartly that this was the old doctrine of kill or cure, wearing out the strength of the patient with violent remedies, by way of enabling him to recover himself! *He* rather recommended a tentative treatment—let them try a diet of ass's milk by all means.

"Which she won't be able to keep on her stomach till we have carried off the bile by an emetic," said Symmachus, decisively.

"I," said Dasius, "consider that we have here a beautiful instance of that mixed state of relaxation and constriction, which Themison has described so clearly—the fever representing, of course, the state of constriction; while the lassitude and exhaustion are plain proofs of relaxation. I should propose to produce, by means of medicine, a *metasyncrisis*, as Thessalus recommends."

"Do you call yourself a Methodicus, and quote that ignorant impostor Thessalus?" cried Archigenes.

"He is no more of an impostor, at any rate, than Asclepiades, the true father of the Methodici," said Symmachus. "However, Thessalus stole that idea of a metasyncrisis from Hippocrates—it is the very thing I recommended! Here we have *de*pletion; let us employ *re*pletion. You have all stolen from Hippocrates, and then you revile him. But as for that scoundrel Asclepiades, let me not hear his name! A quack, who made a fortune by humouring his patients, letting them drink wine whenever they chose, and never cupping them! Such practice is murder, sheer murder!"

"I stand by Aretaeus," said Archigenes. "Violent measures are not lightly to be resorted to—neither, however, are they to be entirely rejected. I should prescribe an emetic; after which, a course of milk diet, on the various kinds of which I have, as you

may possibly know, composed a treatise." Archigenes paused, to give Symmachus an opportunity of admitting that he had heard of his treatise, although his extensive practice had, as yet, given him no time to read it. "An occasional purge of castoreum—which I prepare myself—to make sure the apothecary does not palm off the kidney on the patient instead of the real thing, or adulterate it with gum and blood"—here Archigenes raised his voice and glared at Alcon, whom this remark seemed to confuse a little. "It is by tricks like these that medicine is brought into discredit with the unlearned public," he said severely.

The argument raged some time longer, and the disputants quoted Celsus, Aretaeus, Heraclides, Cleophantus, and Philistion at each other with mutual recrimination, until Alcon, transported with anger at finding himself in a minority, brought up the assertion of Varro, that Hippocrates burnt down the Temple of Aesculapius at Cos in order to destroy the medical books and prescriptions laid up there, which, having previously copied, he was able to claim as his own.

At this, Symmachus flew into a towering passion, accused Varro of having fabricated the story from jealousy of a Greek, and looked ready to tear out the eyes of Alcon. Archigenes, too, denounced the story

as an attempt to slur a great man's reputation by a fabulous legend.

"When some say he burnt the Temple at Cos, and others that at Gnidos," he said, "I shall believe neither, and shall conclude that the story was invented by the unsuccessful physicians of Hippocrates's day, who were angry because he was so immeasurably their superior."

Alcon, thus crushed, apologized with a bad grace, and Symmachus and Archigenes, making common cause, carried the day by their superior learning and eloquence. A treatment was agreed upon, which was to commence by a course of purges and emetics, destined to remove the evil humours left by the fever, to be followed by a nourishing diet, laid down with great minuteness by Archigenes. The physicians then informed Piso of their conclusions, closed their fingers with admirable unconsciousness upon the honorarium with which Piso presented each, and departed with more or less of dignity in their respective chairs.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BETROTHAL.

The time was approaching when some decision must be come to as to Calpurnia's marriage. She was now fourteen—an age at which many girls were already married—and Piso's friends were beginning to wonder how he meant to dispose of her, and his enemies to hint that ambition was the true cause of his rejecting all her suitors.

Of these suitors, besides Crassus, one was a rich and debauched widower of an ancient line. Another was the foppish son of a Publican, a new-made Knight, who had amassed an enormous fortune by farming the taxes of Gallia Togata. Another was a foolish young fellow, chiefly remarkable for his silly speeches and his excellent horses. Another was the descendant of an illustrious house, but head-over-ears in debt, and reputed the most reckless gambler in Rome. Then there was the nephew of the Consul Lateranus, a youth who was emulating his uncle to

the best of his ability, but who had been good enough to assure Piso that he meant to reform when he married.

To all these suitors Piso had returned the same courteous answer—he had already chosen a son-in-law—and the suitors had retired, carrying with them their self-respect undamaged. But as the months went on, and nobody heard anything of Calpurnia's betrothal, it began to be a staple of speculation in "Society" whom Calpurnia was going to marry. Fulvia, in particular, took care to make Calpurnia's remaining so long unbetrothed seem a mysterious circumstance, hinted that her father had very ambitious views indeed, and gave a startling explanation of the Pisos' intimacy with Flavius Clemens.

"She is nearly seventeen," Fulvia would say to a dear friend—with many a significant arching of her (painted) brows, and crooking of her forefinger. "They call her fifteen; she's seventeen, if she's a day. But *I* know his plan. Oh, my dear, he is a deep one—*quite* as artful as poor dear Publius Crassus, that every one thinks so sly!" Crassus had of late cultivated Fulvia. "You may well say it is hardly credible, and that if he had such an idea, it would be the little one he would give to the young Prince. But they say the boy admires her immensely. She's

always at the Palace, and young Vespasianus adores her—a boy's first passion always *is* for a girl older than himself, you know. She *is* rather pretty—and then that yellow hair." (Fulvia's own hair was now black.) "The Pisos are *awfully* thick with Flavius Clemens, my dear, and I have no moral doubt that our Cincinnatus"—this was Fulvia's nickname for Piso—"is counting on—*a change*—you understand me?" Fulvia dropped her voice, and looked unutterable suggestion. "The astrologers, you know—one *can't* help hearing a *little*. What! you don't know what I mean? Castor! Do you mean to say you have never heard what the astrologers say about our Lord God—the Gods preserve him! About his forty-fifth year, you know? Oh yes, of course, it's horrible, shocking, treasonable, and, of course, we know it isn't true; but it's *said*, you know, and no doubt Cincinnatus believes it—or wants to believe it—and he means to keep Calpurnia unmarried till then, and then you'll see—*she* will marry young Vespasianus, and the little one will be betrothed to little Domitianus. Yes, as sure as the Temple of Jove stands on the Capitol! And now I *must* tell you about the insolence of that fellow Sosthenes. You know I picked him up literally starving—picked him out of the gutter! Well, now the wretch objects to carry Micipsa—and he grumbled at the New Year's gifts—and he called

my sweet Tiberius an unlicked cub! How I wished I could have had him whipped! But, unluckily, the wretch is a citizen. I'll never have another preceptor who is a citizen, and never do you, my dear!"

One day, some of Fulvia's remarks found their way back to Piso, who was astounded at being asked by an inquisitive fellow of his acquaintance whether he was to congratulate him on his daughter's betrothal to the eldest of the young heirs to the Empire? Piso emphatically contradicted the report; but he instantly saw the danger to which such a rumour might expose him if it reached the jealous ears of Domitian, and he resolved no longer to delay his consent to Aulus's suit. He would have given this consent before but for his fear that Crassus would denounce Aulus as a Christian. He saw that Calpurnia loved him—the poor child's blushes and pallors betrayed her—and he himself felt a father's affection for his ward, and would have chosen him out of all Rome for Calpurnia's husband. "A Calpurnius Frugi," he said to Aemilia, "can afford to give his daughter to a poor, good man. But for this passing madness, Aulus is a young man of whom any father might be proud. I shall be able to die in peace when I have put her hand in his."

"Alas! Lucius," said Aemilia, "am I, then, so little to you?"

"You are myself—my *alter ego*," said Piso, taking her in his arms. "But she is so tender—such a child! I am a coward when I think of her. I cannot shield her. As you came from your mother's arms to mine, so must she go to her husband's. But you——"

There was a long silence between them; but at last Piso said—

"I sometimes think, Aemilia, that it may be you and I will meet in some other state of being, and be more blest than we have been here. If I could believe it, I would very joyfully endure whatever evils may be about to befall me in this life."

"Oh, Lucius, have you a presentiment of evil?" cried Aemilia.

"Look around you, Aemilia. Beside the inevitable evils of life, to how many others are we of this age exposed! And, Aemilia, my heart misgives me for Tertia. The child's eyes have a look in them which rends my heart."

"Alas!" said Aemilia, bursting into tears. "I have seen it too!"

It remained only to persuade Cornelia; but when Piso had laid all his reasons before her, she withdrew her opposition. The fact that Flavius Clemens had been brought into the succession seemed to be a pledge that Domitian did not intend to molest the Christians.

And—so much are the best of us influenced by worldly considerations—the Christians appeared less contemptible to Cornelia, now that a Christian stood on the very steps of the Imperial throne, and might at any moment become the Master of the World. Then, too, Ascletario had spoken of an honest and a dishonest suitor. Aulus must be the honest one. And a rumour had got about that Crassus had done something sacrilegious—no one knew exactly what, but all agreed that he had defied the Gods to hurt him. Now Ascletario had said that one of the suitors had incurred the anger of the Gods. So Cornelia consented, and even said that Aulus was a very fine young man, very respectful to his elders, and indeed a pattern to many. To make sure, however, she would not be present at the marriage, but would go to the Temple of Diana, and spend the time in deprecating the anger of the Gods—the fact being that Cornelia thought the marriage expedient, but likely to displease Heaven, and she hoped by thus standing aloof to be able to offer an expiatory sacrifice.

It was on a day when Tertia seemed a little better that Piso signified his consent to Aulus. The transports of delight with which Aulus heard him struck Piso with a profound sadness, almost with terror, born of that ancient distrust of fortune so deep-rooted

in a Roman's heart. Was it an indirect confession of the vanity of human life, or had it a deeper meaning still, and did it express man's consciousness that he is out of tune, and that joy and he are grown strange to one another? It is not the thought of an innocent heart that High Heaven resents our happiness. That dark and dreadful fancy—on a superficial view, sheer blasphemy—has its root in the consciousness of sin; and those nations in which the sense of duty and of moral responsibility has been the strongest have been the most haunted by it.

"You are sad, my dearest father!" cried Aulus, his delight suddenly checked as he perceived the cloud on Piso's countenance.

"I have lived, my son," replied Piso, sadly—he would not acknowledge to Aulus that superstitious misgiving—"I have seen many hopes end in disappointment, many marriage-torches quenched in tears. Truly we live between the two torches. Aulus, I shall require my child at your hands! Though I be long dead, yet my memory will rise up to upbraid you, if you do her wrong. And if it be indeed true that we live after death, then will you have to render an account to me of your usage of this tender child!"

He left the room, unable to conceal the emotion which overcame him.

A few days after his conversation with Aulus, Piso called his daughter to the library, and there, taking her hands in his, as she stood before him, he kissed her tenderly on the forehead, and asked her whether she could be content to marry Aulus Atticus.

There was no need for Calpurnia to answer in words. The crimson blush, which dyed even her hands, betrayed her without need of speech. She hung her head a moment, then hid her face upon his shoulder, and he felt her tender arms clinging to him.

"My sweet child!" he said, stroking her golden hair. He thought of Iphigenia, of Virginia, of all the beautiful and unhappy maidens who have been sung in story, and the sense of the illusions of youth forced so deep a sigh from him, that Calpurnia, lifting up her lovely head a moment to look in his face, asked anxiously—

"Why are you sad, dearest father? Are you, then, unwilling?"

"My child," he said, "I do but sigh because you are young, and I am old."

"You are not old, father!" cried Calpurnia. "And you will always be my sweetest, dearest, most honoured and adored father——"

"Look at me, Calpurnia," said Piso, taking her rounded chin in his hand and turning her face towards him. "How would it be if, like Penelope,

you had to choose between Icarius and Ulysses? Nay, do not weep, my delight! *You* need not lose a father because you gain a husband. Come, let us to Aulus."

Piso gently disengaged her arms from his neck, and led her to the atrium, where, near the Altar of the Penates, Aulus, Aemilia, and Messala awaited them.

Calpurnia shrank back a little, and seemed as though she would gladly hide herself behind her father. Then, as Aemilia kissed her, Calpurnia grasped her mother's hand, and would not let it go, even when her father placed her other in Aulus's, saying—

"Love her, Aulus, as I have loved her mother."

He could hardly utter the words for emotion. Aulus took Calpurnia's hand as though he never meant to let it go again. He tried to speak, but tears choked his voice. Then, recovering himself a little, he said, "Calpurnia, let us kneel and ask our father for his blessing!"

Piso laid his hands on their heads, bent low before him. "May all that is good befall you both, my children!" he said.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE ART OF PLEASURE.

Piso took care to be the first to inform Crassus of Calpurnia's betrothal. Crassus affected a resigned acquiescence, but was greatly relieved by the news. At a time when a *change* seemed imminent, Crassus had dreamed for a moment of making his kinsman a stepping-stone, and as long as he had believed that Domitian's hours were numbered, it had appeared a splendid thing to be Piso's son-in-law. He had since then become convinced that the less he had to do with Piso the better for himself. Yet he was very anxious not to seem to Piso to have cooled towards him. One never knows what may happen. Who would ever have thought that Claudius would be Emperor? So Crassus sighed, observed that his cousin Calpurnia naturally preferred so handsome a young man as Atticus, and asked to be permitted to wish her happiness.

Crassus was certainly changing his character—

growing less prudent and more communicative. About this time he had a long conversation with Piso —in Piso's own house—in which he spoke with a frankness surprising to his kinsman. An accidental reference to Lucretius had drawn from Crassus the somewhat dogmatic assertion that it was quite certain there were no Gods.

"Indeed, almost the only thing of which I feel *quite* sure," he said, "is that there is nothing in the whole universe greater than man."

"It is not so *impossible*, Publius, that there are Gods," said Piso, gravely. "Even Lucretius does not venture to say that."

"Has one of the Gods appeared to you, Lucius, that you think they may exist?" said Crassus, with the slightest possible suspicion of a sneer. Piso felt it and flushed.

"No," he said, "I have never seen a God; and but very few godlike men. But I do see that it cannot be more impossible that there should be Gods than that there should be *things*. The existence of *things* is at least as difficult to account for as the existence of Gods."

"The universe has always existed—no reasonable man can doubt it," said Crassus. "It probably consists of a constantly shifting chaos and kosmos, so that some portions of it are in chaos, others in such

a more or less well-ordered kosmos as we see. Our part of it may—probably will, in turn—fall into chaos; while other portions, now in chaos, will emerge into order."

"That is as far as I can get," said Piso. "I will not say that the world *must* be eternal, but I find a beginning and an end alike repugnant to my reason—which, however, can grasp at a continuance. But this idea belongs neither to Lucretius, nor Epicurus, nor Democritus, but to Heraclitus."

"That is true. I believe the grim old Ephesian is the greatest of them all," said Crassus. "For my part, Lucretius is too peevish for me. I cannot agree with him that the world is so very ill-made. The only mistake is that we do not live longer. Consider, Lucius, of what exquisite pleasures we are capable—we that are sufficiently enlightened to make pleasure an art can really get some delicious sensations! Even the peasant gets enough pleasure out of his miserable life to be very loth to die."

"I confess, Publius," said Piso, "that I find this love of life one of the chief puzzles of existence. Long after reason has been convinced of its unprofitableness, a blind instinct makes us cling to it in spite of ourselves. It has at times almost led me to doubt whether death may not be an unnatural accident, and not, as we have so long believed, an inevitable law."

"The briefness of life is certainly a great mistake," said Crassus. "But the briefness of pleasure is, I think, of its very essence. It is of the very nature of pleasure to be fleeting; it is by the acute pang of its ceasing that we know we have enjoyed. But for that pang, pleasure were a tame affair—and accordingly all pleasure which lasts above a minute or two *is* tame. To all pleasure comes satiety—that worst enemy of man, except death; but satiety would come far sooner if the extremes of pleasure did not pass in the instant of our realizing them. Pleasure only reaches its climax in ceasing."

"You almost elevate pleasure to the rank of a virtue, Publius," said Piso. "It appears to me that this notion of yours—that pleasure is greater in proportion as it is transitory—is only another proof that man's happiness consists not in rest and ease, but in action and endeavour. The pleasure we derive from an obstacle overcome is greater than the pleasure we derive from things easily attained. And it appears to me that this extremity of pleasure of which you speak—and of which I admit you speak truly—is only another example of man's love of encountering difficulties. The effort which he makes to catch these moments of exquisite but fleeting delight corresponds to the effort he makes to accomplish any other task."

"By Hercules! Lucius," said Crassus, "I had no

suspicion you could be so subtle! What an Epicurean is lost in you! Quit, I pray you, your stoical errors, and join the ranks of the only philosophers who accept the facts of human life, and make the best of them."

"It is an odd thing," said Piso, "that to Epicureans I seem a Stoic, but to Stoics an Epicurean. I should, methinks, have found the golden mean! The Stoics, you say, ignore man's body; but the Epicureans, Publius, ignore the soul."

"My good cousin, the Stoics would pull down our houses, strip us of all our garments save the philosopher's cloak, and give us pulse to eat and water to drink, with interminable discussions on the beauty of virtue, to prevent our ever looking on the beauty of women. Immortal Gods! Is there a greater folly than the admiration we affect for those barbarous times which we facetiously call the Golden Age? I protest, Lucius, the great Julius seems to me to have shown his greatness quite as much in inventing a sleeve to his tunic as in conquering Pompey!"

"You appear to me, Publius," said Piso, "to place mere bodily ease first of all. Cannot you understand men enduring great toils——"

"Yes, by Hercules!" exclaimed Crassus, his eyes sparkling with a sudden fire, all his smothered ambitions betraying themselves. "Yes, for power, and

not to be surpassed by those one despises; for that, indeed, a man might do much, especially since death is inevitable! Love of ease and love of power—I see but these two things in the world. From these two sources spring all our actions."

"Is there, then, no love of glory, no love of duty?" asked Piso. "Do you not remember that passage in the *Offices* of Cicero—where he says that those very men who have yet hazarded fortune and life for their country have refused to suffer the smallest loss of glory even to save their country—quoting the examples of Callicratidas and Cleombrotus, who lost, the one a fleet, the other an army, rather than not fight when it was expected of them? Now, I do not defend Callicratidas and Cleombrotus; but I say that the motive of their conduct was neither love of ease, nor yet desire for power, for they deliberately threw away their own lives rather than suffer dishonour. Now, how do you account for their conduct?"

"There is an infinite capacity for folly in man," said Crassus, shrugging his shoulders, and wrinkling up his nose. "Wise men know it, and take advantage of it. For my part, I despise mankind too much ever to allow my conduct to be influenced by its opinion."

"That, Publius, is when its opinion is contrary to that of one's own conscience," said Piso. "The *mens sibi conscia recti* can afford to disregard clamours from

without; but when these clamours awaken answering clamours within—— "

"The more fool he, my dear Lucius, to prefer another man's judgment to his own. I thank the Gods, I have too much contempt for men to trouble myself about what they think of me."

"I am not sure, Publius," said Piso, "that a contempt for other men is a prudent thing, or one likely to succeed."

"But who that knows men *can* feel anything but contempt for them?" asked Crassus. "I know not which is the more contemptible, the folly of those we agree to call good, or that of those we call bad. The first are mostly cowards, who, not daring to strike out a path to success, try to obtain credit for what they call their virtue; while the others pursue their aims so stupidly that they only get a bad name. Mankind, Lucius, has ass's ears, and is an ass—made to be driven by the very few who have sense enough to deserve the name of man. You, no doubt, Lucius, think these views cynical, and wonder that an Epicurean should hold them—— "

"No," said Piso; "for extremes meet. And I will admit to you that such is not so very far from my own opinion of men in general. And yet, though all mankind were vicious and foolish, I would wish to be wise and virtuous—yes, even though no man gave me

credit for my virtue. In such a case, I grant you, I could despise the opinion of the whole world."

"Is he only a fanatical Stoic, or a deep dissembler?" thought Crassus, as he supped that night alone. "I think he is right, though; it is an error to let men see you despise them. They are even greater fools than I thought them, and can actually believe they are admired! You may go away, Hylas," he added aloud. "Send Chione to me."

As the boy went off pouting and muttering, Crassus said to himself, "Now for a little amusement. Women are the biggest fools of all, for they believe we love them, and they really do love us. Lucretius is right—the Gods never made these idiots!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

DE EXCIDENDIS VINEIS.

As time went on, Crassus was more and more convinced that he had let the happy hour slip by. It even appeared as though his own favour had waned. New favourites had begun to appear at Court—notably the young cornicularius Clodianus, whose blunt, soldierly manner happened to have taken Domitian's fancy, as much as the young Praetorian's remarkable personal beauty pleased his eye. Crassus found himself a little left out in the cold. It was but a little, and there were times when he seemed to be in as high favour as ever. But just as the wind will suddenly shift round from south to north, and then to south again, so the chill wind of disfavour seemed to Crassus to breathe upon him, and be gone. He tried to console himself by the consideration that Domitian always caressed his victims. But with Domitian one was never safe. Crassus began to be nervous and embarrassed. Once or twice he even said something

mal à propos. He was sure that many were now deeper in Domitian's confidence than he was himself. By his absence, he had lost the thread of the Palace intrigues, and no longer knew exactly how the land lay. He suspected Domitia of an intrigue with Clodianus. Crassus saw that Clodianus, unable by temperament and training to acquire the courtly manners of a palace, had been astute enough not to attempt to ape them; and, when Domitian observed one day that Clodianus was a rough, untutored savage, but an honest fellow, Crassus was confirmed in this opinion.

Another thing which puzzled Crassus was the position which Piso held at Court. During all these months Piso must have either pleased or displeased Domitian. Which was it? Domitian certainly treated Piso with a greater show of respect than he gave to any one else. Crassus sometimes fancied he had become somewhat dependent on Piso's advice. It was but natural that he should consult him on the agricultural questions, which just now were occupying his attention. That year, the corn-harvest in Italy threatened to be deficient, while the prospects of the vintage were unusually promising; and Domitian professed a great anxiety lest the corn-lands should be absorbed in vineyards, and thus Italy become wholly dependent on Egypt and Sicily for grain. Piso

could not deny that the culture of the vine had much increased of late years, and had encroached to some extent on the corn-lands, but thought that this evil would correct itself, as the vines soon deteriorated when planted in soil not proper for them. Nor could the best vineyards be made to produce more than a certain amount of good wine—the Falernian vines, for instance, on Mount Massicus, were being completely spoiled by the greed of the growers, who, in order to get a larger yield of grapes, had taken to training the vines on poplars, instead of, as formerly, on low frames.

"Meanwhile," observed Domitian, "the vine-growers are becoming very rich, and there will soon not be an ear of wheat in Italy for my poor people to eat."

Crassus seldom alluded now to Piso's family; but to-day, as they returned together to the City, he asked if Tertia was so dangerously ill as was reported.

"Alas!" said Piso, "I am extremely anxious about her. I have not the slightest faith in physicians, who, when they are not secret poisoners, are usually only boastful quacks, understanding neither the diseases which they treat nor the remedies which they prescribe. I cannot see that anything has done her the least good—except, perhaps, the ass's milk. I think Symmachus one of the best of our physicians,

because he honestly confesses that the disease baffles him."

"With all our boasted civilization," said Crassus, "it is marvellous how little thought we have devoted to the cure of disease. If men had bestowed as much pains on that as they have on a number of perfectly useless questions, we might by this time have found out how to prolong our lives to centuries instead of lustrums. Even Epicurus wasted a deal of time on proving to us that pleasure is pleasant. There is no pleasure when a man has the head-ache, or the stomach-ache, or is plagued with the gout. I protest, Lucius, there is nothing concerns us half so nearly as the state of our bodies!"

"Many of us are surely sufficiently given to bodily exercises," observed Piso.

"But in what a ridiculously violent way!" said Crassus. "We should reduce health to a science—find out just how much and how little exertion is best—the golden mean of exercise. After all, Lucretius says truly—our bodies are very ill-contrived. How little we can eat, how little drink, how little pleasure we can enjoy, without these wretched, clumsy bodies of ours getting out of order! How much our appetite exceeds our capacity! And how much our desire exceeds our appetite! Satiety lies in wait for us everywhere, and yet, long before satiety overtakes us,

we are arrested by indigestion and a dozen other curses which attend upon enjoyment."

"This is so true, Publius," said Piso, "that some men have been driven by it to seek happiness in pleasures which do not produce these evils."

"The pleasures of virtue, I suppose," said Crassus, with the suppressed sneer which was all he allowed himself in talking with Piso. "By-the-by, will it affect *you* much if he orders all our vines to be cut up, lest his 'poor people' should starve?"

Veiento, who was always trying to draw Crassus into conversation about his cousin, asked him one day whether he was in Piso's confidence.

"Who? I?" said Crassus, stammering. "I don't understand you."

"Oh yes, you do," said Veiento, with that show of shrewd bluntness under which he veiled a profound dissimulation. "Are you in his secrets?"

"I don't believe he has any!" said Crassus. "By the Gods, I don't! He is a stubborn, impracticable man; but surely, my dear Veiento, the most harmless man alive?"

"The stubborn are seldom harmless," said Veiento, drily.

"Oh! but I assure you, he is too cautious, too prudent!" said Crassus, not quite sure what *was* best

to say. "And I really think—we are so intimate—I think Clemens and I are his most intimate friends—I must have observed it, if there had been anything on his mind."

"Then you mean to tell me you suspect nothing?" asked Veiento.

"I? No—I assure you, no," stammered Crassus. "That is, I have seen nothing, heard nothing——"

"But *felt* something?" asked Veiento, quietly.

"Ah, my dear fellow, you press me too hard! One has many passing ideas—and then, when one knows that a man *must* have been solicited—*must*, you know—who could be so good a figure-head for a party as Piso?"

"He is wooden enough, if that is what you mean," said Veiento. "My dear Crassus, your cousin is an admirable example of those detestable old Roman virtues which you and I so cordially dislike. A dull, obstinate man—with a touch of irresolution about him, too. Take a hint from me—keep aloof from him as much as you can without its being noticed. When the walls crack, it is time, you know, to leave the house. You mentioned Clemens—he, I fancy, will not last much longer."

"He! why, I thought he was in greater favour than ever!" said Crassus, cautiously lowering his voice.

"He and Nerva have kept each other alive this great while," said Veiento in Crassus's ear. "*I* advise Caesar to let them both alone; but you know him—every now and then he gets into a panic—or the exchequer runs low. And when that happens, beware! I could tell you of many who had better look out for themselves."

And, with significant waggings of his forefinger, Veiento went his way, leaving Crassus to reflect on what he had said.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE BOLT FALLS.

In spite of some deceitful rallies, it was evident that Tertia was growing worse. She had no appetite. She was always weary and listless, and seemed only to wish to lie still and be let alone. She did not even care for her toys, or for a kitten which had been got for her in the place of the hapless Pasht. She would lie for hours hardly moving, until the domestic snakes —as common in Roman houses as mice—came out of their holes. Tertia liked to see them; it seemed to be the only amusement which pleased her now. She had grown very much during her illness, and was very thin, and her appearance was so changed that Aemilia could not look at her without tears. News had come that Gratilla had died at Gyarus. The gloom deepened every day.

The informations and executions continued. Again and again, Domitian went down to the Senate, and, looking round on the pale Senators with that cruel

and fiery countenance, "wrote down their sighs." He spared neither the evil nor the good—now it was the virtuous Metius Pomposianus, now the infamous Aretinus. As the fatal day, so long ago foretold to him, drew nearer, his own terrors increased, and the more he strove to strike terror. One day, the news spread that Epaphroditus, the Master of Requests, was banished, because he had helped Nero to die. It was no longer enough to cow the Senate—Domitian was trying to scare his freedmen. A few low murmurs made themselves heard; but the splendour and frequency of the Games more than made up for such trifles as the elimination of a fat freedman or two, and Domitian's popularity with the *profanum vulgus* continued unabated.

And then, all of a sudden, the thunderbolt fell. Flavius Clemens—but just out of his Consulship—and his wife Domitilla were charged with "Atheism," or, as others said, with holding "Jewish opinions," and others more vaguely still, with "favouring a foreign superstition." The persons who considered themselves best informed maintained that these charges were a mere blind, to cover the removal of Flavius Clemens. Domitian kept up the farce by putting to death as many of the Christians as he could lay hands on. The Presbyter Nicodemus was beaten to death in prison. One Marcus, the chief of

the Christian community of Atina, was brought into Rome, and put to death with great cruelty, being first made the sport of the Praetorians. A lady named Felicula was beheaded, and her body thrown into the common sewer. Several other persons were accused, and a strict search was made for Christians. But the fate of the lesser victims was almost forgotten in that of Flavius Clemens, the Emperor's own first cousin and the father of the heirs to the Empire. He had no trial—it would have been too dangerous. Almost as soon as it was known that he was accused, he was beheaded in the Mamertine, and Domitilla and her sons were banished.

The horror of this murder of so inoffensive a person appalled even the callous Romans. People refused to believe he *had* turned Christian—or even Jew—it was a trumped-up charge. While he lived, they had despised him for his lack of spirit; but now he was dead an idea got about that by it Domitian had incurred the anger of the Gods. Portents began to be talked of, and when the news reached Rome that Acilius Glabrio had been put to death in banishment for "Atheism," no one believed in the charge. Every one said that Glabrio had perished because Domitian was jealous of the applause he received when he killed the lion at Albanum four years ago, a shameful affront put upon Glabrio in the very year

of his consulship. For the first time in Domitian's reign, public opinion was aroused. Crassus was quick to perceive it. When he saw Piso after the death of Clemens, he said, keenly watching his cousin—

"I am sure you will agree with me, Lucius, that this is a piece of folly hardly to be paralleled! Of course I speak freely to *you*. We are both, I hope, too much of philosophers to take the Christians seriously, and you won't, I'm sure, suspect *me* of any partiality to them. But to condemn a harmless fool, who would have gone on dreaming while Rome was burning! Depend upon it, Lucius, it is a fatal mistake to frighten quiet, peaceable people—by so doing, you raise the whole world against you, and turn lambs into wolves. The majority of people ask only to be let alone and suffered to amuse themselves in their own way. They are the inert mass, and only a fool ever tries to poke them up. Here was a respectable dummy—a perfectly invaluable person in a state—and what does Domitian do but put him to death! The next to go, I suppose, will be poor old Nerva—another respectable dummy. *He* will be removed by our sapient Lord God, and then half a dozen real pretenders will spring up, who have all till now been afraid to stir. Domitian is showing us that it is dangerous to keep quiet! Really, his folly is incredible!"

It would be impossible to describe the terror of Calpurnia at these events. It was too great for words—too great even for tears. Her mother observed that for many days she scarcely spoke—they were the days during which the arrests lasted. Only her eyes questioned the faces of those who came in, asking mutely what had happened. Sometimes she felt that she could not bear it—she would tear Aulus out of her heart, that she might no longer be thus tortured. Why did he expose her and those who loved him to such horrible anguish? She resolved to cease to love him, that she might suffer no more—but could not. She wandered up and down in the atrium—pretending to fetch things she did not want, but really to watch for news. The images of her ancestors seemed to her to grow smaller, shabbier, more faded and insignificant, every time she looked at them. Their wasted waxen features seemed to her dreadfully, horribly meaningless. Would her father's image look the same one day? Would death take all the meaning out of *him*, as it had out of *them*? How much better never to live, than to live knowing one must die! Tertia was ill—perhaps *she* would die. Calpurnia envied her at that moment. Her little sister had never suffered such pangs as these. Yes; it was better to die, since the things which can happen to one are too terrible to be endured!

And under all these wild incoherent thoughts, one scene was ever present to Calpurnia's mind—she saw the lion crouching in the arena, and Aristarchus advancing out of the shadow, and heard the jeers and hoots of the people.

During one of these dreadful days, it happened that Calpurnia was left alone with Aulus, while Aemilia went to see whether Tertia—who took great delight in his visits—was awake. The betrothed lovers were left alone.

Calpurnia sat by her embroidery frame, but did not even make a show of working. Her arms hung listlessly down, her head drooped—she seemed but half alive.

Aulus rose, and, going to her, took one of her hands in his.

"Calpurnia," he whispered softly, "forgive me, if I have any part in causing you this grief."

She grasped his hand convulsively. Then, as he knelt beside her, she suddenly laid her head on his shoulder and burst into tears.

"Why is it? Oh, why is it?" she sobbed.

Aulus did not speak for some moments. A strange joy welled up in his heart as he held her in his arms.

"What can I say, my dearest life?" he said at last, "except that you are dearer to me than my life——"

"Hear me, Aulus!" she said, unclasping her arms

from his neck. She took him by the shoulders, and looked in his face—her own all wet with tears. "I must say it—if you love me, why, for a mere doctrine that people talk about, will you throw your life away? Why, for a thing which you have but heard from some one else, bring yourself to a dreadful, disgraceful death"—she shuddered—"rather than show a little respect to those Gods whom Rome has honoured for so many ages? Even if you are right, surely your God will not require that you should deny all your old Gods for His sake? Oh! what a hard Master He must be, since He demands that you shall offend your father and mother, and insult your country's Gods! If He really loved men enough to die for them, will He not see how hard a thing He asks, and pity and forgive you if you cannot do it?"

"He might perhaps forgive me," replied Aulus; "but since He died for me, shall I refuse to die for Him?"

"If He was a God, it was easier for Him," said Calpurnia. "I do not ask you to deny Him—only to sacrifice, if—if you are arrested. Oh, Aulus, what matters a handful of incense and a few words—'Be propitious, Best and Greatest!' Could you not say that—you can mean the words for *Him*—did you not say He is the True Jove, and the real Father of Gods and men?"

"I could do so, Calpurnia," replied Aulus, quietly; "but is it the daughter of Lucius Piso, the descendant of the Scipios and the Aemilii, who counsels me to save my life by a lie——"

"They are tyrants and wicked men whom you deceive!" said Calpurnia, eagerly.

"Calpurnia, have you forgotten the story of Marcus Atilius Regulus?" said Aulus. "He had promised to return to Carthage, if the Romans rejected the Carthaginian conditions of peace. The Carthaginians were of all men the most perfidious, and Regulus himself was so convinced that no peace ought to be made with them, that he persuaded the Senate to reject the conditions. Might he not have said that no faith need be kept with these violators of treaties? Is not 'Punic faith' a byword to this day? Might he not have listened to the prayers of his friends—for he too, Calpurnia, had friends who would have had him break his word, and remain in Rome? But he chose rather to die; and he has ever since been praised in Roman story, and men point to him as an example of Roman honour. Yet you, Calpurnia, counsel me to save myself by a lie! But if I should do it, I should hear the voice of Marcus Regulus saying to me, '*I* laid down my life rather than violate my oath to the enemies of my country—but *you* have broken yours to Him who laid down His life for you.'"

Calpurnia did not reply. At first she had looked at Aulus; but, as he went on, her eyes fell, and when he ended, she sat silent, until her mother returned, to fetch Aulus to see Tertia.

CHAPTER XXXV.

TONANS.

The human mind, still more the human heart and conscience are so exquisitely balanced, that a breath suffices to disturb their equilibrium. It was strange that Calpurnia should have been more powerfully impressed by the story of Regulus—which she had heard a hundred times before—than by all which Domitilla, Tryphosa, and even Aulus himself had ever urged; but so it was. Perhaps it was that Calpurnia now saw for herself a proof that the Christian morality deserved the praise which Domitilla had given it. Perhaps Calpurnia's remorse at seeing herself convicted of having made a suggestion unworthy of the daughter of Lucius Piso, had brought her into a more humble and receptive frame of mind. But, however it was, she henceforth approached the subject of the Christian doctrines in a different temper. She no longer looked upon them as idle speculations or ignorant superstitions. Aulus had put her to shame; and instead of feeling, as she had felt hitherto, that

she had to pardon him a great folly, the tables were turned. It was she who had cause to blush, she who must try to regain *his* good opinion! Instead of his needing to assure her that he held no wicked or degrading sentiments, she had need to assure him that *she* did not regard an oath lightly, and was not insensible to honour! She had loved Aulus with a love which, however strong and tender, yet was mixed with pity and regret. Her old playfellow had too firm a hold on her heart for her to give him up; but she had been ashamed of him for being a Christian. Now, she found herself anxiously desiring to excuse herself in his eyes—to retract what she had said; in fact, astonishing as it was, to prove to him that *her* morality was as pure as his own!

From this time her interest in the Christian doctrines became much more serious, and she lost no opportunity of asking Aulus more about them. But such opportunities were rare. She was seldom alone with him, and the fear of being overheard or interrupted greatly hindered freedom of speech.

On almost the last day of the year, Domitian himself examined two descendants of the ancient royal house of Judaea, accused of being Christians, and of having talked of setting up a Kingdom. In their examination, they confessed that they were of the lineage of David, and were the grandsons of one of the twelve

companions of "Chrestus." But their whole behaviour and appearance was so little formidable, that when, being questioned about the "Kingdom," they replied that it was not an earthly but a heavenly Kingdom, and that they did not look for it until the end of the world, Domitian called them harmless madmen, and dismissed them.

After this, the Christians breathed more freely. The recent persecution had been a mere excuse to remove Flavius Clemens. The succession to the empire was offered to several persons; but all declined it—as too great an honour.

The portents continued. It was whispered that Domitian had received a very unfavourable reply from Praenestine Fortune on New Year's Day, and a thunderstorm which happened shortly after placed the matter beyond a doubt. The Capitol was struck —an infallible sign of Heaven's displeasure. But lest this should not be enough, the weather became unseasonably close and sultry, and one thunderstorm after another burst over the City.

This time the bolts of Jove fell on the Temple of the Flavian Family. A week afterwards, the vain-glorious and lying title on the base of Domitian's great equestrian statue in the middle of the Forum was torn off in a tempest; and, worst of all, the famous Cypress of Reate fell down in calm weather.

Although to speak of these things was as much as a man's life was worth, they *were* spoken of at every hot-water shop, in every tavern, at every street-corner. All Rome knew that no one would live in the empty rooms once inhabited by Flavius Clemens. All Rome believed that the shade of Flavius had appeared to Domitian—all bloody, like the divine Julius at Philippi—and knew for certain that Domitian had dreamed that Minerva departed from the shrine he had dedicated to her.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DE CONTEMPTU MORTIS.

The death of Flavius Clemens had made an indelible impression on Piso. It happened that at their last interview the conversation had turned on the effect upon morals of the belief that the soul has no existence after death.

It was to be expected that Clemens should hold this to be a degrading and depraving doctrine, but Piso himself was compelled to agree with him. In a grave and hesitating way, he had himself once inclined to accept the Philosophy which Lucretius clothed with the majesty of his verse. If this Philosophy did not satisfy him altogether, it offended his reason less than any other. Piso was acutely alive to ridicule, and a sceptical Philosophy promised him, as he fancied, the laugh on his own side—since all are agreed to laugh at the credulous, but to call the doubter a shrewd fellow. The arguments of Lucretius seemed to Piso to be unanswerable—until he heard

Crassus repeat them—for although the words of Flavius Clemens made but little impression upon him, and Clemens himself seemed to him only a virtuous visionary, yet no sooner did Piso hear Crassus scoff at the thunderbolts of Jove, than he found himself ready to quote Clemens. If Piso had ever become a Christian, Crassus, not Flavius Clemens, would have convinced him.

But the scepticism of the age had eaten too deeply into his intellect. Virtue herself sometimes seemed to be but a beautiful dream of the philosophers. This dream was in Piso's eyes man's most precious inheritance; but he sometimes doubted whether it were more than a dream. Certainly, Epicurus spoke truly when he said that most men desire pleasure above all things. Who would dare to contradict him here? The Stoics might protest that virtue brings the greatest pleasure; but the most rigid of the Stoics never dared deny that most men seek pleasure. Yes; pleasure is our aim, and the Stoics lure us to virtue by telling us that virtue is pleasant. And so he wandered in the labyrinth, "in endless mazes lost"—doubting of all things, for ever haunted by the consciousness of inconsistency, since, in the irony of things, he who was most enlightened seemed to him to be basest; and, argue on which side he would, Piso always found himself arguing against his convictions.

He had said something to this effect to Clemens, deploring the eternal contradiction between man's aspirations and circumstances.

"This is because you look on man as a beast that perisheth," said Clemens. "Consider him as a soul and spirit that must live for ever, and his aspirations are no longer a mockery, but an earnest of his final victory. It is the sense of this contradiction which makes the philosophy of Lucretius so degrading. Having given up belief in the Gods and a future life, men fall into despair, and snatch at the joys of sense —the only ones left to them."

"I think," said Piso, at last, "that you say truly, and that it is a great evil that men should cease to believe in a life after death. The belief that the soul remains alive and remembers what things it did while still united to the body, has, I think, been the cause of many great deeds. For I think that, without it, men would not have exerted themselves as they have done, nor have undergone such amazing toil and hardships. And when I look at the deeds of those who have scoffed at the Gods—of Claudius and Catiline, and men like them—and compare them with men like Cincinnatus, and Camillus, and the Scipios, and the Decii, I see that the one set of men have been the enemies of the State, while the others have been her saviours."

"Go farther still, Lucius," said Flavius Clemens. "Compare the simplicity of those times with the luxury of our own, and you will see that the times differed as much as the men."

"It seems to me," continued Piso, very thoughtfully, "that Lucretius is quite wrong in what he says of this; and that the great and good of old would not have exerted themselves as they did, and have undergone those prodigious toils, but for this belief in the Gods! I do not say that they would have done base deeds—no; for the virtuous mind abhors such things out of its own virtue. But assuredly they would have lived less arduous lives—such lives, let us say, as the peasant lives, whose little field seems to him the whole world. What to him are the speculations of philosophy?"

"He would tell you," said Clemens, smiling, "that they were invented by idle persons, who wished to have an excuse for sitting still."

"Then," continued Piso, "what an incentive to us is the remembrance of the great deeds of our ancestors! And of how much more importance do they seem, if we believe that those ancestors of ours are still alive, and, as we say, *gone over ad Plures!* I think that a conviction of the briefness of life tends to fill men's hearts with a kind of despair, and with a lethargy such as comes from despair, so that even good men

would find themselves asking, 'What does it matter?' And so they would gradually yield to indolence, and, growing tired of strife, would take their ease, and, as our Lucretius says—

> 'Sit on the sweet grass, by the river's brink,
> Beneath a tall tree's shade.'"

"And yet," said Clemens, "although Lucretius is always praising simple pleasures, and telling us that we need not envy the great, it appears to me that he was profoundly conscious of the emptiness of man's life—

> 'Art thou then wroth for this, that thou must die,
> Whose life's a death to thee beholding it?
> Wasting in sleep the chiefest of thine hours,
> And waking, snoring still, and dreaming still,
> Thy anxious mind disturbed by vain alarms—
> Nor canst thou find the reason of thy woe.'

Is not this, Lucius, a hard thing to say of man's life? Is it not as hard as anything we Christians say of it? And is the state of man so far changed for the better that it is no longer true?"

"Indeed, Clemens," said Piso, "although Lucretius lived in the times of the Civil Wars, yet I think our days are even worse, since manners are still more corrupt, and good men have ceased even to hope that our former state will ever be restored."

"And that former state," said Clemens, "was it free from disappointments, ambitions, vain hopes,

false accusations, jealousies, sickness, and the evils of old age? Truly, Lucius, I marvel that man should so cling to life!"

"It is an instinct which we share with our first-cousins, the beasts," said Piso.

"The beasts are not troubled by apprehension—they die but once," said Clemens. "Man dies a thousand deaths before he dies. The more he has, the more he has to lose. So hope and fear play at ball with him—hope tempting him on, fear scaring him back. Truly, man at his best estate is altogether vanity."

"Yet you believe, Clemens," said Piso, "that you have discovered an answer to the enigma, and with a singular, and to me incomprehensible inconsistency, you appear to find this life more tolerable at the same time that you profess to be certain that a much happier life awaits good men after death."

"Why should that surprise you, Lucius?" said Clemens. "Surely it is easy to endure injustice, if one looks for new heavens and a new earth wherein justice shall dwell."

Now that Flavius Clemens was dead—slain unjustly, this belief of his in justice to be done hereafter powerfully attracted Piso. Almost unconsciously he found himself looking at persons and events in the light of this justice. In imagination he saw the victims of

Domitian — and chief among them Thrasea and Rusticus—appearing before the Judgment Seat, where sat the Three Judges, veiled and awful. Domitian himself must one day appear there too.

Piso had been used to think of these stories with the respect due to venerable legends embodying a protest against the injustice which befalls mankind. He had never been able to scoff at the idea of a judgment to come; it offended his sense of moral propriety when others scoffed. If it is unhappily true that wickedness and injustice often go unpunished, this is no fit subject for jesting for any but persons who have reason to rejoice that there is no such thing as future retribution. Even Lucretius's magnificent denunciations of superstitious fear displeased Piso. It appeared to him that to tell a man he had nothing to dread after death was not likely to make him better. The vulgar saying, "It will be all the same in a hundred years," seemed to him to sum up the teaching of Lucretius—although, of course, no good man would act upon it. And, to Piso's sober and logical mind, it was very disagreeable to hold a philosophy of which he was thus obliged to say that no good man would act upon it.

END OF VOL. II.

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